EXPLORING THE PUBLIC PURPOSES OF EDUCATION IN AUSTRALIAN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Report of an ARC Linkage Project: July 2010[1]

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[1] Note: This report is a summary of the research conducted. More detailed discussions of various aspects of this research are provided in the links contained within the report.

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Executive Summary

Part 1 of the report outlines the genesis of the research project, the reason for researching the public purposes of education, the research questions and the research methodologies.

Historically, Australian schools were seen as central to the project of nation building. That is, as well as enhancing the life prospects of individuals, schooling also had a number of public purposes which included, for example, building skills to advance the economy, and fostering understandings of citizenship and dispositions for the polity. These public purposes were refined in public discussion as Australian education slowly expanded. However, in the latter part of the 20th century, this settlement around the public purposes of Australian schools was disrupted for a number of reasons. These included the significant economic and cultural changes that altered, and continue to alter our society; the changing political arrangements resulting from the decision to provide state funding to private schools; and the dominance of neo-liberal ideology and its focus on public choice theory.

These trends and the responses to them are reshaping schooling, and yet there has been little analysis of the implications of these changes for the purposes of education. This has meant, in turn, that there has been no benchmark against which to make and evaluate educational policy and practice. In our view, this is partly due to a lack of clarity regarding the concept of educational purposes, and, more specifically, education's public purposes. Given the amount of state and federal money that is put into the schooling sector each year, it is crucial that the Australian community and its educators are clear about the purposes of public expenditure on education, and the extent to which these are being realised. That is the purpose of this research project, the key questions of which were:

- How are the purposes of schooling understood in the literature?

- What are the public purposes of education today, and why should they be central to education policy and practice?

- How are the purposes of education, and specifically its public purposes, understood and enacted in Australian primary schools and the wider community?

- What are the factors that facilitate or inhibit the enactment of these public purposes in schools?

- What are the implications for educational policy and practice?

- How can the findings of the project contribute to professional strategies for school principals, and ongoing discourses about the public purposes of schooling and their successful enactment?

The research involved literature reviews, analyses of policy makers' positions, policy documentation, and the role of the media, case studies of schools, and an Australia–wide survey of Australian government primary principals.

Part 2 of the report explores the concepts surrounding the purposes of education. It argues that educational practice is informed by its purposes, and that such purposes are the outcome of political processes. It argues that this results in broad 'settlements' which shape educational discourses at particular historical moments.

The report proposes three broad purposes of education – democratic, individual and economic. These purposes interact and become assertive under different conditions. Given the high status of purpose within education there will always be a dominant purpose.

- The *democratic* purpose is located in a society which expects its schools to prepare all young people to be active and competent participants in democratic life. Since this benefits the society as a whole, it is a public purpose.

- The *individual* purpose aims to advantage the individual in social and economic life. It treats education as a commodity and supports school choice within an educational consumption approach. It posits education as a private good for individual benefits and is therefore a private purpose.

- The *economic* purpose aims to prepare young people as competent economic contributors. Since this combines public economic benefits with private economic benefits, it is a constrained public purpose.

Purposes are shaped and delivered through three modalities of schooling: the structure of schooling, the official curriculum, and the culture and processes of education systems and schools. A healthy education system is seen as one where there is strong compatibility within and between the modalities of schooling and the stated purposes of education.

Part 3 of the report argues for a return to a renewed emphasis on democratic **public purposes** for Australian education. Over the past decade, the major educational purpose has been an individual one, dominated by the ideology of choice. This has resulted in increased competition between schools and the residualisation of public education. We argue that the dilution of public purposes and the growth of individual purposes have negative impacts upon the common good. In a globalised and more complex world, where the nature and role of the nation state is changing, schooling based upon public purposes becomes more important.

How can the public (democratic) purposes of education be advanced? Since active democracy requires capabilities for its nourishment, the central work of schools in a democratic society is the development of the capacities for social practice. This has

implications for the modalities of schooling. From the perspective of public (democratic) purposes of education, the structure of schooling would seek to ensure equality of educational opportunities and resources for the needs of students; the curriculum would ensure that all students are encouraged and enabled to develop the capacities necessary for a democratic society; and the culture and processes of schooling would be based upon and model democratic processes.

It is one thing to argue in the abstract for a renewed focus on the public (democratic) purposes of education, however it is quite another to develop educational policy and practice in ways that are consistent with it. The important next step in the research was to conduct a reconnaissance of the field in order to identify the ways in which educational purposes are understood and enacted in the Australian education system. Such information is required if a professional association like AGPPA is to realistically determine a strategy for promoting and enacting the public purposes of education.

Part 4 of the report outlines the results of our research into how the purposes of education (and, more specifically, its public purposes) are understood and enacted in Australian primary schools and in the wider community. This research was conducted through an analysis of the role of policy texts, policy makers and the media in constructing a discourse about the purposes of education; in-depth case studies of six schools; and an online survey questionnaire of principals in Australian government primary schools.

Policy texts, policy makers and the media: Interviews were conducted with 15 senior policy makers in education, including Ministers from across four states. Many of these policy makers had clear views of education as a public good. Understandings about the public purposes of education were variously connected to the 'common good', equity and disadvantage, and community building. The interviewees identified various barriers to the achievement of public purposes, such as a preoccupation by treasury officials with the economic outcomes of education, media attacks on public schools, and lack of parental support. In particular there was a view that national political agendas, including accountability measures, privilege private over public purposes and work against their enactment.

Most of the analysed policy texts were framed within discussions about changing and challenging contexts for schooling. In these contexts, the documents generally placed a strong focus on the economic purposes of education. Based on the rapidity of policy text production during the course of the project, it seems that educational change is equated with policy pronouncements.

Three case studies of media reportage of education showed the influence of the media in shaping assumptions and public attitudes about the purposes of education Media reportage of educational issues was often simplistic and driven by competition for readership, with opinion being reported as fact. Given the influence of the media on policy makers in

education, the case studies raised some challenging questions about how the design and management of educational initiatives and reforms that serve public purposes should be conducted through the media.

School based case studies: In-depth case studies were undertaken in four government and two Catholic schools in four states and involved interviews and focus groups with school personnel, observations of meetings and classrooms, and analyses of school documents. The case studies demonstrated combinations of six stated and implicit purposes of education: a love of learning for its own sake; student self-efficacy; student social-efficacy; student skills in literacy and numeracy; equity, social justice and democratic equality; and community development. These are largely public purposes and are enacted through four broad groupings of strategies:

(1) the development of a culture that supports the public purposes of schooling – one that is inclusive and democratic; (2) leadership that models the desired culture and works hard to sustain it, including continuous professional learning, the sharing of insights, evidence-based policy making, the de-privitisation of teaching practice, and the use of the school's purposes and goals as reference points for decision-making; (3) contribution to community building through in-school community participation and utilising the community as a resource; and (4) curriculum strategies which broaden rather than narrow the learning experience, incorporate negotiation with students, individualise the curriculum and organise the whole school around a major public purpose theme.

The case studies showed that stated educational purposes cannot automatically be designated as public or private. It is the language used to talk about purposes and the strategies used to deliver them that reveal the intention. The purposes of schooling are enacted through each of the three modalities. However, a rhetorical commitment to public purposes is insufficient if the strategies to deliver them at the school level and the policies at the system levels respectively, do not match these purposes.

The case studies also indicated that the cultural modalities are preconditions for the delivery of public purposes. A conceptualisation of communities comprising professional learners will nourish these modalities and will sustain ongoing discussion and debate about schools' public purposes.

National survey of principals: The survey was sent to all AGGPA affiliate members across all Australian states and territories, who constitute the vast bulk of government school primary principals. The survey questions were derived from the previous work of the project and comprised 71 items against which respondents were asked to rate the levels of importance and levels of enactment of educational purposes. Three open-ended questions were included. A response rate of approximately 25 per cent was achieved.

A major finding from this survey was that primary principals are clear that (democratic) public purposes ought be at the top of the agenda when determining what primary schools should be aiming towards, and that (economic and individual) private purposes should have

a lesser focus. However, there was a big gap between support for public purposes and their enactment. That is, the survey findings revealed tensions between what principals believed ought to be purposes of education and how they might be achieved, and the realities of what was actually happening. This would suggest a shift away from public purposes in enactment.

The open-ended responses indicated that barriers external to the school, such as funding, bureaucracy, and the media, dominate. There was a sense of anger and despair at what was seen as a lack of fairness in the management and treatment of public education in Australia, and the perceived differences in the treatment of government and non-government schools. This included funding patterns, and an imbalance of responsibility between the sectors in enrolling 'all comers' – especially the more challenging students.

Two powerful messages were revealed in the survey: there is inadequate resource support for students with socio-economic disadvantage and/or learning needs, and there is concern about the focus on, and impact of the national testing regime and its associated accountabilities.

Summary: The research demonstrated that if the public purposes of education are to be taken seriously there needs to be an alignment between the stated goals and intentions of education policy and the strategies that are designed to deliver them. This suggests the need for there to be a critical scrutiny of policies, programs and practices at the level of both systems and schools, by educators and the general community. If the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* is to be taken seriously, then the public purpose goals it sets out should be used as the benchmark for assessment. The sorts of questions that might be asked of policies, programs and practices would relate to the extent to which they contribute to the wider social good or community benefit. These would include consideration about whether they:

- Help to develop capacities for democratic participation

- Contribute to the health of the whole system

- Include rather than exclude

- Support a quality education for all

- Promote a culture of collaboration

- Model democratic decision-making

A short analytical tool is proposed to aid educators in the task of subjecting policies, programs and practices to critical examination. The tool is designed to be used by AGPPA n its response to the national policy agenda, and by schools for the purposes of policy development and analysis, and professional development.

Part 5 of the report demonstrates how such an analytical tool might be used to consider the strategies that the federal government has developed and implemented in the name of the 'Education Revolution'. It asks whether these strategies will help to achieve or impede the rhetorical commitment to the public purposes of education represented in the *Melbourne Declaration*. It concludes that at the rhetorical level, the *Melbourne Goals of Schooling* adopts a public purposes stance. However, the report uses three case study examples to show that much of the policy described under the banner of the Education Revolution is, in fact, contradictory to the stated *Goals of Schooling*. It argues that the government needs to make the *Melbourne Goals* the touchstone for its policy making, rather than consigning it to the margins. Not to do so is to force schools to work against the grain as they seek to pursue the public purposes of education in an environment which is antagonistic to those very aims.

Part 6 concludes the report by drawing together the research findings in order to arrive at a set of recommendations for action. There is a brief preamble to each group of recommendations, where reference is made to the reason for the recommendation, and its basis in the research.

Recommendation 1: That education policy and its delivery is based upon a democratically agreed set of purposes.

Recommendation 2: That agreed-upon purposes are used as a central reference point for policy development and educational practice across funding and resources, curriculum, culture and processes.

Recommendation 3: That consistent with available evidence, this set of purposes would have at its heart public purposes which are based upon a commitment to:
- a cohesive and just community;

- responsible, competent and active citizens for democracy and the common good;

- social justice.

Recommendation 4: That the governance and funding of schools must reflect the public purposes of schools by ensuring that school systems can guarantee equitable and just provision, rather than promoting individual schools to compete in an educational market.

Recommendation 5: That a schooling system which is committed to public purposes of education must be underpinned by a transparent resourcing approach, which:

- requires delivery of a curriculum for the public good (see recommendations 6, 7 and 8 below);

- supports inclusive school practices in regards to enrolments and curriculum;

- reflects educational need;

- considers the level of public resources in relation to resources the school has access to from other sources.

Recommendation 6: That the curriculum and its enactment are based upon a commitment to student development of agreed capabilities to live productive lives in a democratic society.

Recommendation 7: That the official curriculum should not comprise a disconnected collection of understandings and skills, but be based on a coherent view of the whole curriculum and the connections among its component parts.

Recommendation 8: That system-wide assessments reflect all aspects of learning, not just a narrow band that is thought to be easily measured.

Recommendation 9: That decision-making and subsequent change/reform at all levels of education and schooling be democratic, evidence-based and transparent, and involve, where possible and relevant, education professionals, parents, students and the wider community.

Recommendation 10: That education policy and practice should be based on a commitment to the creation of system-wide cultures of trust, respect and collaboration, and promote communities of professional learners.

Recommendation 11: That accountability should not encourage exclusionary practices, narrowing of the curriculum, or competition among schools and teachers. Rather, accountability should be open, professional, transparent, inquiry-based, rigorous and focused upon all aspects of learning.

Recommendation 12: That school leaders take professional responsibility, individually and through their professional associations, for articulating and enacting the public purposes of education in schools and education systems.

Recommendation 13: That pre-service teacher education and ongoing professional learning be provided to build awareness of and the capacity to deliver the recommendations in this report.

Part 1: The research questions and their rationale

1.1 The genesis of the project

In 2006, the Australian Government Primary Principals Association (AGPPA) executive invited Professor Alan Reid to an executive meeting to discuss the concept of the Education Commons [1], an idea that he had canvassed in a paper written for the Australian Council of Deans of Education[2]. At the heart of the paper was a commitment to the public purposes of education. During the course of the ensuing discussion it was agreed that, in recent times, the public purposes of education had been pushed to the background of public policy making, and that people in publicly funded institutions like universities, schools and professional associations had a responsibility to question this trend. After all, since there is a considerable investment of public funds in Australian educational institutions, all should be serving a number of public purposes.

Notwithstanding the above, it was also agreed that the meaning of concepts like public purpose[3] and public good are very vague and, in any case, change over time. Out of this discussion was born the idea of a research project to investigate the ways in which the concept of the public purposes of education is understood and enacted in contemporary times. Whilst it might seem obvious that schools should serve public purposes, such purposes are usually assumed, rather than clearly articulated, and they seldom receive research attention or the focus of public debate.

It was decided to target the Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage Grant scheme, which funds research projects involving university academics and their 'industry partners'. The AGPPA executive identified academics from four universities to work with them on the application: Professor Neil Cranston (then from the University of Queensland, now with the University of Tasmania), Professor Jack Keating (University of Melbourne), Professor Bill Mulford (University of Tasmania), and Professor Alan Reid (University of South Australia). Over the next few months, the AGPPA executive met with the four academics to begin the process of developing a research proposal. During the course of that time, it was decided to also invite the Foundation for Young Australians (then called the Education Foundation) to be an industry partner.

In November 2006 it was announced that the application had been successful, attracting a total cash contribution of $324,000 ($250,000 from the ARC, $70,000 from AGPPA, and $4000 from the FYA), and in-kind support from the industry partners over a three-year

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[2] The LINKS in this report are largely the working documents and papers from our research, on which our research findings are based. With a few exceptions, they are not designed for publication. They can be accessed independently from the AGPPA website.

[3] By public purposes we mean educational purposes that advance the interests of society as a whole, rather than the interests of individuals or special interest groupings, and about which there is a general consensus as determined by the democratic processes and structures of that society (see the following parts of this report).

period. The research commenced in 2007 and concluded in June 2010. In summary, the research project involved four academics from universities in four different states, working with key professional organisations to explore the public purposes of schooling and their enactment.

1.2 Deciding on the research questions and process

1.2.1 Why study the purposes of education[4]?

Until the 1870s in the various Australian colonies, education was provided by religious societies and private institutions with only minimal regulation by the state. Those children who attended school – and many working-class children did not – did so only long enough to obtain basic literacy and numeracy. It was largely the children of the wealthy who completed a secondary education at elite private colleges, with many proceeding to university.

By the 1870s, colonial governments were concerned that many children, particularly working-class children, were not attending school. It was felt that this was creating adverse effects, not least on the economy, as many jobs were increasingly demanding basic literacy and numeracy skills. Clearly, if children were not going to attend school on a voluntary basis they would have to be compelled to do so. It was decided that this task should be assumed by the state. Thus the Australian colonies began to establish public schools that were funded by the public purse for specific public purposes. There was to be a strict separation between church and state, with public monies being used to establish and run public (state) schools only.

At first the purposes of schooling were quite constrained. For example, compulsory public education was confined to basic or elementary schooling, with secondary education in the main being available only to those who paid fees at private colleges (i.e., the children of the colonial upper and middle classes). However, over time, a changing economy and society began to place increasing expectations on the state to expand its educational provision. Gradually the nature, scope and purposes of Australian government schooling began to change. Thus, during the 20th century, the compulsory school-leaving age rose slowly (in most states today it is at least 16 years of age), the curriculum broadened, and increasing numbers of students began to attend publicly-provided secondary schools, as well as private independent and Catholic secondary schools. (See [3a] & [3b] for a more detailed history of the purposes of schooling in Australia.)

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[4] Please note that although we use the broad term 'purposes of education', this report focuses on that concept in relation to government primary schools in Australia.

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Throughout this time Australian schools were seen as being central to the project of nation building. That is, as well as enhancing the life chances of individuals, schooling also had a number of public purposes which included, for example, building skills for the economy and fostering understandings of citizenship and dispositions for the polity. These public purposes were refined in public discussion as Australian education expanded slowly. However, in the latter part of the 20th century, this settlement around the public purposes of Australian schools has been disrupted for a number of reasons:

- The impact of advances in science and technology, the increasing diversity, urbanisation and ageing of the Australian population, the growth of a knowledge-based society, the globalisation of economies and cultures, and pressures on the environment are challenging the very nature of schooling (see [4a] & [4b] for an analysis of the forces affecting Australian society and education, and the implications of these trends for schools). These challenges are causing education organisations and systems around the world to rethink the structures and processes of schooling, including its leadership, and the curriculum. However, this work is proceeding in the absence of an ongoing public conversation about the purposes of schooling in a changing environment.

- The political settlement in which the purposes of schools were delivered by an amalgam of publicly-funded state schools, private independent and Catholic schools was irrevocably altered in the 1960s and 1970s when successive federal governments, both Liberal and Labor, began to fund both public and private schools. This broke the century-long educational settlement based on the separation of church and state. Importantly, the provision of public funds to private schools has blurred the distinction between public and private schools. Schooling provision in Australia is now shared between state-owned and state-regulated schools, and publicly subsidised and publicly regulated 'private' schools. A change of this magnitude has significant implications for the way in which the public purposes of schooling have been traditionally understood and enacted. However, to date there has been no detailed or systematic examination of what the public purposes of schooling might be for Australia's hybrid public/publicly subsidised system of schooling, beyond rhetoric about the public good.

- Policy tendencies, such as the dominance of public choice theory, the education market, competition, user-pays principles, public–private partnerships, self-governing schools and increased centralised accountability are altering the nature of educational discourse in Australia and in other parts of the world. Education is seen increasingly as a commodity accessed by individuals as a positional (private) good, rather than as a public good. In such an environment, what passes for educational debate about this issue tends to focus on crude binaries, where choice is counterpoised against the public good, and public education against private education. In the absence of any ongoing analysis and review of the public purposes

of schooling, the concept of the public good has been emptied of meaning. (See [5a] & [5b] for a more detailed analysis of current political trends and the impact on the purposes of schooling.)

These trends and the responses to them are reshaping schooling. And yet there has been little prior analysis of the implications of these changes for the purposes of education. This has meant, in turn, that there is no benchmark against which to make and evaluate educational policy and practice. Certainly, the 2008 *Melbourne Goals of Schooling* [25] is one attempt to express national purposes for schooling but, as we will argue in a later section of this report, these have been forgotten as quickly as they have been developed, and as a consequence they are frequently contradicted by education policy. In our view, this is partly the result of a lack of clarity about the meaning of the concept of educational purposes, and specifically its public purposes.

 Given the amount of state and federal money that is put into the schooling sector each year, it is crucial that the Australian community and its educators are clear about the purposes of public expenditure on education and the extent to which these purposes are being realised. That is the broad purpose of this research project.

1.2.2 The research questions

Although the research is based on a commitment to the importance of the public purposes of education, we realised that we would need to move backwards and forwards between the broad idea of the purposes of education and its more specific public purposes. For example, we wanted to get some conceptual clarity about the concept of the purposes of education more broadly, before developing an argument for the centrality of public purposes and identifying the kinds of purposes which will best meet the needs of Australian society in the early part of the 21st century. We needed to investigate the ways in which the purposes of education are currently understood and enacted today by policy makers, educators and the wider community, before assessing these against our developing understanding of public purposes. In this way we gradually developed an appreciation of the kinds of policies and strategies that might best promote the public purposes of schooling, without ignoring its other purposes[5].

Thus the key research questions – which also form the structure of this report – were:

- How are the purposes of education understood in the literature? (See Part 2.)

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[5] Given the fact that the issues for primary and secondary education in the current environment differ in some respects, the study focused on primary schools in order to both contain and focus the project. However, we believe that the findings of the research project hold the potential to inform policy in relation to secondary schools, and lay a strong basis for further research in the secondary area.

- What are the public purposes of education today, and why should they be central to education policy and practice? (See Part 3.)

- How are the purposes of education, and specifically its public purposes, understood and enacted in Australian schools and the wider community? (See Part 4.)

- What are the factors that facilitate and/or inhibit the enactment of these public purposes in schools. (See Parts 4 and 5.)

- What are the implications for educational policy and practice? (See Part 6.)

- How can the findings of the project contribute to (a) professional strategies for school principals, and (b) ongoing discourses about the public purposes of schooling and their successful enactment? (See the Professional Learning materials [24])

1.2.3 The research process

The research comprised five interrelated phases. Each of these phases explored different research questions, but taken together we believe that they provide a strong foundation for the recommendations in Part 6[6].

Phase 1, in the first half of 2007, involved a literature review of the national and international research about the purposes of schooling, and specifically its public purposes. This was done to develop the theoretical framework for the study, and to identify criteria for the achievement of public purposes.

Phase 2, in the second half of 2007, comprised critical analyses of current understandings held by key educational stakeholders about the public purposes of schooling. These included document analysis, interviews with a wide range of stakeholders (e.g., education system authorities – state, non-state, professional associations, business councils, unions, parent bodies), and an analysis of media representations.

Phase 3, in 2008, involved six comprehensive case studies of four state and two Catholic schools in four states. The case studies used the criteria developed in the first phase of the study as the reference point for analysis. They provided rich descriptions of the enactment of the general purposes of schooling and also its public purposes.

Phase 4, in April and May of 2009, involved an electronic survey questionnaire of principals in government primary schools across Australia. The construction of the survey was informed by the knowledge gained in Phases 1, 2 and 3 of the project. The survey

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[6] It should be noted that all school sectors across Australia were invited to participate in this research. For example, direct invitations were extended to the non-government and Catholic schooling sectors. They declined to participate, except for a limited involvement in the case studies and policy maker interviews.

probed principals' understanding and their enactment of the purposes of schooling, and also, specifically, its public purposes, in greater depth and across a more comprehensive range of school sites than was possible with a more limited number of case studies.

Phase 5, from January to June 2010, involved writing this report and detailing the findings of the research, with recommendations for action, and preparing a set of professional learning materials for use by schools. The researchers are also writing a book and a number of refereed journal articles based on the research findings.

1.3 The uses of the research findings

It is intended that this report will be used in multiple ways and for multiple purposes. It will (a) contribute to the literature in this important area; (b) inform the policy and strategies of AGPPA and the Foundation for Young Australians, both in the wider political arena and within education systems; and (c) provide professional learning and evaluation resources that will assist principals and their staff to further engage with the question of public purposes, and to develop strategies for achieving these public purposes in their school communities.

Part 2: What is meant by the concept of the purposes of education?

2.1 The struggle over the purposes of education

Any educational practice or policy is informed by its purpose(s). (See [2a] & [2b] for an expanded version of this section.) Sometimes these purposes are explicit and transparent, sometimes they are implicit or even subconscious, but they are always present. They are not arrived at transcendentally – the purposes of education invariably derive from a political process which, like any political process, involves a contest over, *inter alia*, values, ideologies and assumptions. These are represented in education debates, in policy development and implementation, and in educational practice, and they are based on questions as diverse as the type of society we want, the best strategies to promote excellence in education, and the sorts of capabilities that should be developed in students. They are never resolved completely. Rather there is often a kind of policy 'settlement' (Hall, 1990), during which time a dominant purpose tends to shape – but not monopolise – the parameters of educational discourse.

The struggle over purposes and directions takes place in the presence of at least two central tensions. The resolution of these tensions at any point in time serves to shape the nature of educational purposes. The first tension, at the level of 'content', occurs at the interstices between conservation and aspiration. There are those who argue that the role of education is to serve society by conserving and reproducing the societal status quo, while there are others who assert that education is a major vehicle for change in our society by making it, for example, more socially just and environmentally sustainable. There are, of course, any number of positions that may be taken along this continuum.

The second tension lies at the intersection between private and public rights and responsibilities (Levin, 1987). On the one hand there is the right of parents to bring up their children as they see fit – choosing the values and environmental influences to which they want their children to be exposed. From this perspective the purposes of education are largely a private matter, in the sense that they promote the interests of individuals. On the other hand, there is the right of a democratic society to try to ensure, through a common schooling experience, that its future citizens are prepared to play a role in maintaining the society's most essential political, economic and social institutions (Gutman, 1987). From this perspective the purposes of education have a strong public emphasis, in that they advance the interests of society as a whole.

It is the relationship between the public and the private purposes of education that is of interest to us in this research project. Of course, there need not necessarily be a conflict

between public and private purposes of education. The aggregated private benefits of school might make a person more productive and a useful contributor to, say the economy (public). But so too can these purposes be at odds. For example, the official curriculum of formal schooling might require – as a perceived public benefit – that students therefore learn to consider points of view with which the private values of families may be in conflict. As a consequence, parents may wish that their children are not exposed to such views. At this point there is a clash between public and private purposes.

As we have argued, the history of education is largely a history of the struggle to resolve these tensions (See [3a] & [3b]). These struggles are rarely named as debates over the purposes of education – rather, these are assumed – but invariably their resolution shapes the prevailing education settlement, the nature of educational discourse and subsequent policy. This in turn determines whether there is an emphasis on the private or public purposes of education. In order to understand this process it is necessary to appreciate the major ways in which these purposes have been represented in educational discourse. It is to that task that we now turn.

2.2 Representing the purposes of education

The struggle for a resolution to the tensions described above sharpens the kinds of questions that are asked about the role of schools – for example, whether they exist to help better society, or to assist students to adapt to society's operation, or to serve the individual needs and wants of students. We have used the work of a number of scholars from England and the United States (e.g., Labaree, 1997; Inglis, 2004; Goodlad et al, 2008) to arrive at three broad purposes of education – democratic, individual and economic – each of which is constructed from a particular perspective. We think that these purposes resonate with the Australian experience, although they have been played out in different ways at different times.

Although we will describe each of these purposes, it is important to recognise that they never exist in their pure form. They interweave and intersect, and sometimes contradict, in a variety of ways and configurations, depending on the nature of the policy settlement in any historical period. However, we argue that there is always a **dominant purpose**, and that this shapes the ways in which policy and practice play out. The question of whether the right balance of public and private purposes has ever been achieved is an important, although neglected one in debates about public policy. In addition of course, the way in which a purpose is translated can vary greatly, depending in part on the ideologies that are brought to bear. For example, a democratic purpose based on a participatory view of democracy will look differently to one which adopts a view of democracy founded on confining citizenship to voting in elections.

We will describe each purpose in turn, drawing on Australian examples to explain the implications of each major purpose, particularly in relation to the extent to which it represents a public or private benefit.

2.2.1 Democratic equality (democratic purpose)

The first is a democratic purpose which is constructed from the perspective of the citizen. It refers to a society which expects its schools to prepare **all** of its young people to be active and competent participants in democratic life. We say 'all' to emphasise that from this perspective, contemporary democracy is not a hierarchical activity designed for special groups: it relies on the active participation of all citizens. If a healthy democracy depends on the collective judgment of the whole citizenry, then it follows that all of its citizens should have the opportunity to engage actively in it, and, following Sen (2009), should have the capabilities to so engage. Schools are a major vehicle through which these capabilities are fostered.

There are a number of implications that go with a dominantly democratic purpose of education. The first is that, since this purpose is designed to benefit the society as a whole, it is a **public** purpose. That is, the outcomes of education go beyond individual interest, although clearly there are individual benefits that derive from being an active citizen. A democratic society depends on its citizens being in possession of a range of capabilities to enable them to contribute to the economy, the polity and civil society, and to lead productive and fulfilling lives. It does not advantage that society to include people who lack skills and understandings, who are alienated and disenchanted, or who act purely from self-interest – and so the aim is that all citizens have the capabilities for productive democratic functioning.

A second implication is that, since educational institutions are a central agency in our society for the development of these capabilities, then all aspects of schooling should be consistent with a democratic purpose. The most obvious is the official curriculum, which from a democratic perspective must be broad and comprehensive, canvassing areas of learning (and the associated skills) that are most likely to develop agreed capabilities for democratic citizenship and a love of learning. More than this, well-resourced schools would be equally available to all, the process of decision-making at the system and school levels would be democratic, and personal relationships would model democratic, respectful and ethical behaviour based on trust and collaboration. Recognising that equality does not mean equal treatment, every effort would be made to ensure that those who are least powerful or possess the smallest helpings of the dominant cultural capital would be able to engage fully in education.

Clearly, the interpretation of these principles vary within and across specific historical times and circumstances. In the 1970s in Australia, for example, efforts were made to cater for an expanding and increasingly diverse student population and to enable students to stay longer at school. Thus, the democratic equality purposes of schooling were enacted through policies based on philosophies of equity, access and participation. While these policies also served private purposes, in the sense that they enhanced the life trajectories of individuals, they had a predominantly democratic public purpose: they aimed at enriching the economic, cultural and political life of Australian society through a more broadly educated citizenry and workforce. This began to be diluted in the 1980s.

2.2.2 Social mobility purpose (individual purpose)

The second purpose is constructed from the perspective of the individual. Its primary aim for schools is to provide individuals with credentials which will advantage them in the competition for desirable social positions; it is often justified in terms of education providing a 'ladder of opportunity'. Hard work and ability, it claims, will enable people to achieve their aims and their life ambitions. This purpose constructs education as a commodity which can be traded in, say, the labour market.

Another aspect of this purpose relates to values, cultures and beliefs. It posits that parents should be able to choose schools which are most consistent with their own personal religion, culture or beliefs. That is, rather than schools being vehicles inculcating the broader values of the society, they have a more personal focus, and instil the idiosyncratic beliefs and values of particular groups.

There are a number of implications that follow if there is a dominantly individual purpose of schooling. The first is that, since it makes the main focus the individual rather than society, it is a private good which serves mainly **private** purposes. This is not to say that self-interested individuals cannot make a contribution to society: there are times when the interests of society and the interest of the individual will coincide. But we argue that the public good is much more than the sum of individual goods. The individual purpose will always privilege the interests of the individual and when these conflict with the public good, it is the private purpose that will prevail.

As with the other major purposes, a dominant focus on an individual purpose demands some consistency within and between the various aspects of schooling. The central concept is that of choice (Tyack, 2007). Schools are seen as a part of an education market where consumers (parents and students) select the product that best meets their perceived interests and needs. The role of an education system is to provide a safety net for those who fall between the cracks and to ensure that consumers are provided with enough information to facilitate choice. The curriculum will tend to be differentiated, tailored to the perceived

interest and abilities of individual students, and schools are likely to be autonomous units, competing for custom in the education market.

In Australia, the most recent period where the individual purpose was the major purpose of education was during the decade of the Howard Liberal Government from 1996–2007 (See [5a] & [5b]). This resulted from the emergence of neo-liberalism as the dominant policy discourse. In education, neo-liberal ideology was based upon school choice and was facilitated by a federal government funding regime which encouraged the development of a diverse group of new private schools. Schools were expected to win market share by appealing to, and satisfying the needs and wants of individual 'consumers' (parents and students). Ideas, techniques and practices from the private sector were proposed to promote individual school accountability. But in the end it was the education market that was to impose the strictest discipline. There was some change to this policy settlement with the election of the Rudd/Gillard Labor Government in November 2007.

2.2.3 Social efficiency (economic purpose)

The third is an economic purpose which is constructed from the perspective of the employer and/or worker. Its primary aim for schools is to prepare young people to be competent and productive workers within the economy. If society benefits from an economy that is working well, then an education based on economic goals is a public purpose. But it is a public purpose that also has a strong private purpose as it results in economic rewards for individuals. It could be called a **constrained public purpose**.

There are a number of implications for schooling when economic efficiency becomes the overriding purpose of education, not the least of which is that the vocational purposes of schooling are foregrounded at the expense of a broader general education. There is often a return to the vocational–academic binary with separate and inevitably stratified curricula and even separate schools. Having an entrepreneurial or competitive disposition is emphasised and the curriculum tends to privilege the life of the individual and consumer more than the active and engaged citizen (Nussbaum, 2010).

It is clear that the current Rudd/Gillard Labor Government has shifted the dominant educational purpose from an individual purpose (under Howard) to an economic purpose, with almost every major government document and statement emphasising the importance of education to the development of human capital (e.g., ALP, 2007). For example, education is not a stand alone item in what is known as the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agenda – it is listed under the priority of productivity – and most of the strategies under the name of the 'Education Revolution' are justified in terms of their contribution to building human capital (e.g., Gillard, 2010). Students are seen as (potential) human capital to be enlisted in the cause of economic recovery and growth.

2.3 Three modalities of schooling

Of course, educational purposes are not simply represented in official statements of missions and goals. They are shaped and delivered – both intentionally and unintentionally – through policy and practice in schools and education systems in many different ways. Since there are so many of these, we propose that they be organised into manageable groupings using the concept *modalities of schooling* (Reid, Gill & Sears, 2010). These include:

- the *structure of schooling*, such as the ways in which formal schooling is organised and funded which contain hidden messages about the how the society is/should be structured, ordered and maintained;

- the *official curriculum*, such as organisation of knowledge, including which knowledge is selected and omitted; assessment and reporting practices; and pedagogy;

- the *culture and processes* of education systems and schools, such as social relationships, the nature of decision-making processes, the school ethos and so on – all of which are educative.

We are using the three modalities of schooling for two reasons in this research. First, since it is possible to see in any or all of these modalities the tangible expression of educational purposes (whether intended or not), they provide one way to track and make sense of both policy and practice in schooling. This enables the researcher to identify possible inconsistencies between, say, the curriculum of the school and its stated purposes. Second, the modalities are a framework for structuring our recommendations in Part 6 of this report.

One way of thinking about the relationship between the modalities and the purposes of schooling is to use the metaphor of the body – where the institution of the school (or the education system itself) is the body, the purposes of schooling are the heart, and the modalities are the arteries. If the arteries get 'clogged' as a result of being incompatible with the heart, then the body will suffer. In short, to achieve a healthy education system there must be a strong compatibility within and between the modalities of schooling and the stated purposes of education.

All of this of course begs the question: what sort of purposes should Australian schools be pursuing in the 21st century? This is a normative question which must be answered in order to establish a reference point against which to assess policy and practice in education. In Part 3, we argue for a return to a **democratic public purpose** for Australian education.

Exploring the Public Purposes of Education in Australian Primary Schools

Part 3: An argument for the public purposes of education

3.1 An argument for a democratic purpose

As we pointed out in Part 2, during the period of the Howard Government the dominant educational purpose was an individual one. Education policy was based on the private benefits of education as developed through education markets and individual choice. That is, the private benefits of education became the point of reference for the debate, inside a framing of individual choice. Elsewhere we have shown how this has played out and with what effects (See [5a] & [5b]).

The shift in conceptualising education as a social good to an individual good was facilitated through the ideology of choice which lay at the heart of government policy in relation to education funding. It resulted in what Lyndsay Connors (2000) refers to as the 'demutualisation' of schooling, meaning the loss of that sense of reciprocity, altruism and 'love of strangers' that characterises an education system governed by a commitment to the common good (p. 72). In a commodified education system, the dominant ethos is that of self-interest which erodes the 'bonds of citizenship' (Ichilov, 2009, p. 2).

There is now enough empirical research around the world for us to understand the social effects of constructing education around individual choice (Whitty et al., 1998; Ball, 2003). Such research has demonstrated that marketised schooling systems result in reduced diversity within student populations and a significant growth in the disparity of resources between schools. These differentiations are invariably organised on the basis of socio-economic status, ethnicity, religion and race. The focus on individual choice within education markets began to create a number of tendencies in Australia, including competition both within and between public and private schools, the imperative to market schools, and the residualisation of public education

Our review of the literature leads us to contend that an emphasis on the private purposes of education is unhealthy for Australian society, not least because it runs the danger of producing self-interested, competitive and culturally-bound individuals who are more interested in their own self-advancement than they are in making a contribution to the common good. In a globalising world where the role of the nation state is changing and societies are becoming increasingly culturally diverse, schools are necessary for the public purpose of forming active citizens for democratic publics - people with the will and commitment to shape, and participate in an inclusive and democratic civil society and polity that is responsive to the new environment. As Goodlad argues in the American context, schools are the only institutions with the capacity to '… provide the education necessary to the existence and renewal of a democratic public …' (2008, p. 11). What then does a democratic purpose for schools entail for Australia in the 21st century?

3.2 Reassessing the democratic purpose of education

If the dominant educational discourse in Australian education has tended to emphasise the individual and economic purposes of education at the expense of its democratic public purpose, returning to an emphasis on the democratic purpose means more than reprising what has gone before. Democracy is not a static process and there should be ongoing reassessment of the capabilities needed for active participation in a democratic society. In particular, we argue that there are three aspects that require attention if the concept of the public good is to be placed at the centre of policy considerations.

3.2.1 Altering the dominant discourse in education

The nature of the discourse about purposes of schooling must change. In our view, one of the problems is that there has been too great a focus on individual rights in public discourse. This has tended to work against community efforts to articulate a conception of the 'good' society. For both egalitarian liberals arguing for civil liberties within a welfare state, or libertarian liberals maintaining that the market and individual choice are the best ways to order society, the starting point is the separate individual pursuing his/her own ends. The logical conclusion of this philosophy is a neutral framework of rights which is agnostic in relation to purposes and ends.

We concur with the communitarian critics of rights-based liberalism that individuals cannot be separate from their context in this way. Since our identity as individuals also relates to our membership of the communities in which we reside, then the purposes or ends of those communities are central to us as individuals and as a collective. Sandel (2005) summarises it in this way:

> (Communitarians) … question the liberal claim for the priority of the right over the good, and the freely choosing individual it embodies. Following Aristotle, they argue that we cannot justify political arrangements without reference to common purposes and ends, and that we cannot conceive of ourselves without reference to our role as citizens, as participants in a common life. (p. 152)

From this perspective individual rights and the common good must coexist. This does not suggest a fixed and unalterable vision of the common good that denies diversity and change – indeed, the opposite is true. The version of the common good at any point should be tentative and always open to scrutiny. Democratic societies require forums for thinking about and negotiating differences, not with a view to reaching agreement but with a commitment to recognizing that there are ways other than our own through which to view the world. As Kalantzis (2001, p. 13) argues, negotiating the difficulties of living with diversity in global/local societies through promoting inter-ethnic dialogues is a new way

forward for nation building: 'Negotiating diversity is now the only way to produce social cohesion.'

In our view, reinterpreting the common good and reinvigorating our public institutions is perhaps the most pressing challenge for Australian society in the 21st century. It demands that capable citizens engage in the sort of community debate that is required for this task. Since schools represent the only place in our society where young people can systematically develop the skills and understanding, respect and tolerance that is the lifeblood of a democracy, it follows that revitalising a discourse of public purposes for education stands as an important first step.

The articulation and achievement of the public purposes of education should also be seen holistically, rather than applied to disparate elements of the Australian education agenda. For example, the discussion about education funding is usually conducted in the absence of a consideration of public purposes, even when the focus is on what has come to be called the public/private debate. This has had a number of effects. By not subjecting the concept of the public good to ongoing critical scrutiny, the debate is narrowed to one focused on the competition for funds between education systems. Thus, when private schools are funded, the focus of debate becomes the funding mechanisms, freeing private schools of expectations (beyond minimal requirements) about the relationship between public funding and the public purposes of education. By not making the public good a central factor in the debate it loses its potency – it doesn't get grounded. This leaves public schools open to the ravages of neo-liberal regimes, including markets and competition. After all, what is public about stand alone schools in competition? To put it another way, marginalising the concept of the public good has had the effect of releasing private schools from the burden of demonstrating that they meet public purposes, and instead places pressure on public schools to act privately; to brand and advertise themselves in an education market.

We think that one way to address this problem is to alter the dominant educational language, and we suggest that the metaphor of an Education Commons presents a possibility. This concept comes from environmental literature (e.g., Lessig, 2001). Commons are community resources that are held in common and able to be enjoyed equally. When applied to social resources, it is possible to understand education as a public resource domain (a Commons), which contains a range of public education resources – such as schools, universities and public facilities like museums – that are non-exclusionary. The right to this domain would apply to all in the community. Preserving and enhancing the health of the Education Commons could be seen as the same as caring for the environment. Thus, rather than seeing individual choices as being all-important, the focus would be on the health of the Commons as a whole (Reid, 2003).

How does employing a metaphor like the Commons [1] help to reassert the notion of the public good into contemporary education policy and debate? The Commons is a spatial

rather than a product metaphor. It suggests a public space where there is room to move, yet which is bounded. The public good is expressed in public principles – a charter for an Education Commons – that set the limits of tolerance; and these public principles are defined by a rejuvenated version of the public good. Whilst there are many variations within the Commons, those educational 'resources' that go beyond the limit of tolerance are excluded.

If education policy making and practice are to be assessed against a number of public principles that define an Education Commons, the identification and content of these principles must become the subject of ongoing public conversation and debate. This task demands an appreciation of the 'content' of an education which serves public purposes.

3.2.2. Clarification about the public purposes of education

Connell (1995) describes the central purpose of schools as being the development of 'capacities for social practice', meaning capacities to enable young people to acquire learning strategies for themselves as individuals, and to maintain these as the collective property of the society. These capacities are a broad set of capabilities, including social and cultural capabilities, not just a narrow band of 'academic' studies, and are central to future life opportunities, and for maintaining a healthy democracy (Giroux, 2005).

The capacity for social practice has economic, ideological and political dimensions. It includes capacities for work; for social interaction, involving culture, identity formation and communication; and the 'capacity for power', by which Connell means the capacity to engage responsibly in the political life of a democracy (1995, p. 100). The identification of such capacities is a starting point for discussion about the public purposes of education. Indeed, it should be central to the functioning of a healthy democracy. As Nussbaum (2010) argues:

> All modern democracies…. are societies in which the meaning and ultimate goals of human life are topics of reasonable disagreement among citizens who hold many different religious and secular views, and these citizens will naturally differ about how far various types of humanistic education serve their own particular goals. What we can agree about is that young people all over the world, in any nation lucky enough to be democratic, need to grow up to be participants in a form of government in which the people inform themselves about crucial issues they will address as voters and, sometimes, as elected or appointed officials. (2010, p. 9)

The rapidly changing nature of the contemporary world means that this should be an ongoing public conversation; a complex concept like the public benefits of education must always take account of contemporary trends and circumstances. Elsewhere we have

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discussed some of the trends that are impacting on the contemporary world (See [4a] & [4b]) and these provide some insights into the nature of the capabilities needed for productive participation in a democratic society. They include:

Capabilities for civic participation – including the capabilities needed to participate in political debate and public decision-making. This demands not only social, scientific and political understandings and skills for active participation that are sensitive to the local, national, regional and global dimensions of political and civil life, but also the dispositions to engage in reasoned and ethical ways.

Capabilities for social and environmental sustainability – including a deep understanding about the issues facing the natural environment and the social world, and the interdependence of these, and the skills and dispositions to engage in working towards the sustainability of both.

Capabilities for intercultural understanding – including the understanding and skills to appreciate diversity and to communicate respectfully and generously within, as well as across groups with different backgrounds, experiences and cultures.

Capabilities for communication – including the capacity for expression through a range of media and modes (written, spoken, visual and other non-verbal forms of communication), and understanding and appreciation of the communication of others.

Capabilities for health, well-being and personal development – including the capacity to manage physical and mental health, understand gender and sexuality, and build identity.

Capabilities for work – including the ability to participate in work in productive, creative and fulfilling ways, recognising the changing nature of the economy.

Capabilities for knowledge-work – including the technical skills necessary to access and organise information, the meta-cognitive capabilities to engage in critical and reflective thinking and inquiry, and the capacity for ethical thinking and reasoning.

We offer this list as an example only: we appreciate that there may be many other ways to express and represent the kinds of capabilities required to live productive and fulfilling lives (e.g., Sehr, 1997, pp 78-81; Soder et al., 2001; Reimers, 2006; Alexander, 2009). But our point is that such a list represents a set of understandings and skills which have the public benefits of education as their starting point, rather than the advancement of individual interests. In our view, if there is to be a shift to a democratic purpose of education in 21st century Australian society, the 'content' of such a purpose must be clarified, and urgently.

3.2.3 Representing public purposes in the three modalities of schooling

The third aspect that needs clarification is the vehicles through which the public purposes of schooling can be expressed. We say this because all too often a rhetorical flourish about public purposes attends the introduction of the latest strategy – only to be ignored by its detail and practice, or to be contradicted by other polices or strategies. Earlier we argued that articulated purposes of education should be reflected in three modalities of schooling. If they are not, then it is likely that a specific purpose will be thwarted by policies and practices that are inconsistent, or directly contradictory. In our view, then, an important aspect of policy making in education is to identify the characteristics of each modality in relation to a favoured purpose. In the case of a democratic purpose, we argue that the modalities would reflect the following kinds of characteristics.

3.2.3.1 Structure of schooling

Structures of schooling consistent with a democratic purpose would seek to ensure that there is an equality of educational opportunities and resources across an educational jurisdiction. Rather than schools competing against one another in an education market, schools in an Education Commons would support each other, working towards a goal of high quality for all. While this might appear to be commonsense, it is not the way that the system works in a neo-liberal policy regime, where choice and competition are the norm. It demands different ways of looking at educational issues, leading to different questions being asked in the policy making process. For example, a focus on the democratic purposes of education might lead to basing a consideration about funding schools in the Education Commons on the understanding that so called 'successful' schools are only successful because it is the more disadvantaged schools who bear the burden of teaching the most 'difficult-to-teach' students. Far from lagging behind, it is these schools that are the real innovators. As Richard Teese points out:

> In the end, the quality of a school system can be judged by the experience of the most vulnerable children in it. A real commitment to them is a real commitment to all children everywhere in the system. It therefore must be supported by an intensity of effort, high expectations and solidarity in sharing resources. (2006, p. 21)

Looked at from another perspective, if we believe that the quality of teachers is one of the main determinants of educational achievements, would we allow wealthy schools to provide better pay and conditions in order to attract the best teachers and principals, or would we insist that if there are to be differentials in pay and conditions, these should in fact work in favour of the least-advantaged schools?

3.2.3.2 Curriculum

The curriculum of schools consistent with a democratic purpose would ensure that all students are encouraged to develop the capabilities identified as necessary for a democratic society. This does not necessarily mean a common curriculum – although we think that this is required in the compulsory years of schooling. It is possible to have a differentiated curriculum which seeks to develop common capabilities. But it does mean that hierarchical approaches to curriculum structure which relegate some knowledge to high status so rendering other knowledge as low status, are incompatible with democratic purposes - more so when we know that the participation in each at the senior secondary level is largely organised around socio-economic status.

It also means that serious attention should be paid to the 'content' of the curriculum. In our view, a curriculum that meets the challenges of living and working in the 21st century should be one that encourages cross-disciplinary work, is broad enough to build all capabilities while enabling depth, embraces a range of assessment and reporting approaches, and recognises that curriculum content is not neutral, but rather embodies cultural and social capital.

3.2.3.3 Culture and processes

From a public purpose perspective, the cultures and processes of schools and education systems would be consistent with a democratic culture and practices. There are many aspects to such a culture: we will describe four.

First, it means that democratic processes should be a feature of every aspect of decision-making – in classrooms, staffrooms, schools and systems. That is, an education system serious about its democratic purpose should model democratic practices. Teacher, student and parental involvement in discussion and debate about key educational issues would be the norm. The benchmark against which this might be judged is the extent to which the voices and interests of the least powerful are at the centre of these processes. Moreover, the social relations of such a system would eschew hierarchy and power, respect diversity, and encourage civility, trust, collaboration and good humour in its social relations.

Second, the substance of policies, strategies and approaches should not only be arrived at democratically but should embody democratic purposes. For example, it would be counterproductive to proclaim a democratic purpose whilst pursuing an accountability policy based on an intention to lift standards by 'naming and shaming'; or to implement a policy without providing the necessary time and resources for professional development.

Third, schools would operate in ways that value diversity through community building. This would include putting structures and strategies in place to promote inclusiveness, so that students are not cosseted in homogenous communities, but are exposed to young people from a range of cultures and backgrounds. That is, assimilationist notions of diversity would be avoided in favour of negotiating diversity while developing a sense of shared community. This might mean making formal and substantial connections beyond the school with a breadth of local, national and international communities and their knowledges. Young (1990) calls this the 'being together' of others.

Fourth, schools and education systems would be communities of professional learners engaging in rigorous and systematic inquiry into the issues, problems, concerns and dilemmas that confront them in their daily professional lives (Reid, 2004; Mulford, 2007). This would be in contrast to mandated and standardised policy impositions on school communities which deny the contextual knowledge of those communities and marginalise the professional expertise of educators.

We do not have the space here to flesh out the implications of each of these, but some recent work by the World Bank (see Grootaert, et al., 2004, p. 3) provides a framework for conceptualising the connections. It argues for the importance of social capital [27] to the development of cohesive yet diverse communities, and proposes three forms of social capital – bonding, bridging and linking. Schools are the key producers of each of these. They create spaces that allow people to develop a sense of common community; of appreciation and respect for difference; and of a will to continue to develop the skills and understanding necessary to use and expand social capital. Where aspects of school policy or practice are at odds with one or more aspects of social capital, it would prompt a review. For example, what happens if the population of a school is relatively homogenous in terms of ethnicity or religious belief or socio-economic background? While such a school might be capable of promoting bonding within the school community, what are the impediments to linking with others outside the school, and how might these be addressed by schools and governments?

3.3 Conclusion

In this section we have argued for a return to a focus on the public purposes of education. We claimed that if this is to happen there must be a reassessment of what such a purpose means in Australia in the 21st century. We began this task by expanding on the public benefit outcomes of education, and we proposed the concept of an Education Commons as one way to contest the individualistic discourse that has so dominated education policy making for the past quarter of a century. Such a concept causes us to think about the health of the Commons as a whole, and to ask questions, not about how schools might compete in

an education market, but about how they might all contribute to collaborating and sharing, and supporting one another in order to produce the very best educational outcomes for *all* students. This is a distinction of great importance because, as we have argued, the direction in which we move will shape the sort of democratic society we are and might become. Rather than privileging the individual and private benefits of education, education policy would be constructed to reflect such important public purposes as the enhancement of a tolerant and cohesive multicultural society.

This is an urgent task. If a major social purpose of education is to nurture our democracy, then surely we need to organise schools, as key social institutions for the development of an active citizenry, in ways which are consistent with, and indeed, promote those attributes, cultures and practices which make up democratic life. Organising schools on the basis of choice is to elevate individual needs and wants above community needs, and to ensure that some benefit more than others; to promote a culture of selfish individualism where the dominating motif is competition and greedy self-interest rather than cooperation and mutual benefit. Never have schools been more needed in our society as mutualising institutions than now.

However, it is one thing to argue in the abstract for a renewed focus on the public (democratic) purposes of education – quite another to develop educational policy and practice in ways that are consistent with it. An important next step is to conduct a reconnaissance of the field in order to establish (a) what educators and the wider community think are the purposes of education and why; (b) the extent of the enactment of these purposes; and (c) the factors that impede or enable the pursuit of public purposes. It is only armed with this information that a professional association like AGPPA can realistically determine a strategy for promoting and enacting the public purposes of education.

Our research moved to the reconnaissance phase through an assessment of the stance of educational policy makers and the media on the purposes of education; the conduct of case study research of four state primary schools; and a survey of all government primary school principals in Australia. The outcomes of this research are described in Part 4.

Part 4: How are the purposes of schooling understood and enacted?

4.1 Overview of the research

This section of the report addresses the research conducted into two of the project's six research questions:

- How are the purposes of education, and specifically its public purposes, understood and enacted in Australian primary schools and the wider community?

- What are the factors that facilitate and/or inhibit the enactment of these public purposes in schools?

To answer these questions we investigated the views and the practices of key participants and stakeholders in the institution of schooling, such as principals and teachers, school communities (students, teachers and parents), policy makers in the bureaucracy, government ministers, educational agencies, parent and professional associations, and teacher unions. The 'lens' for our analysis was the conceptual framework described in Parts 2 and 3 of this report. In order to make this a manageable task, we decided to engage in three major research activities over a two-year period. Each of these is described in this part of the report, with links to papers and research data associated with them. They are:

4.1.1 An analysis of the role of policy texts, policy makers and the role of the media

The first phase of the research involved a critical analysis of current understandings held by key educational stakeholders about the purposes of schooling, and more specifically, public purposes, as revealed through:

- document analysis of relevant strategic state and national educational policies;

- in-depth, semi-structured interviews with a range of significant stakeholders, including leaders of education system authorities (e.g., Ministers, Chief Executive Officers), peak state and non-state education bodies, professional associations, business councils, unions and parent bodies;

- an analysis of the role of the media in constructing the ways in which the purposes of schools are understood in the community.

This research is reported on in **4.2** below.

4.1.2 Case studies of schools

The next phase of the study involved comprehensive case studies of four state and two Catholic schools in four different states. The case studies provided rich descriptions of the enactment of the public purposes of schooling in the government primary sector. This research is reported on in **4.3** below.

4.1.3 Survey questionnaire of Australian government primary principals

The final phase of the research involved a national online survey for principals targeting all government primary schools across Australia. The survey was designed to probe principals' views about what the priority purposes of education should be, and the extent of enactment of these in their schools. It gave us access to more comprehensive data across a range of school sites than was possible with the limited number of case studies. This research is reported on in **4.4** below[7].

4.2 Overview of analysis of policy makers, policy texts and the role of the media

4.2.1 Introduction

The way in which the purposes of education are understood in the professional and wider communities is, in large part, shaped by the dominant discourse about education. In this section we briefly summarise our findings from interviews with key policy makers, and an analysis of policy texts, to demonstrate this process at work in relation to the purposes of education, and, more specifically, its public purposes. The policy makers' views are drawn from a series of 15 in-depth interviews conducted across Australia with individuals such as Ministers of Education, heads of education systems, leaders of education bodies (government and non-government), heads of parents' bodies, and union and business leaders. The selected policy documents represent some recent major policy drivers across state education systems. The analysis of the interviews and documents has been framed by our understanding of the concept of the purposes of schooling described in Parts 2 and 3 of this report.

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[7] In addition to addressing the research questions, the national survey instrument also became a self-evaluation professional development tool for use by schools in relation to the purposes of schooling. This is included in the professional learning materials [24].

4.2.2 Interviews with key policy makers

The interviews with key policy makers and participants were conducted in four states. The selected quotes used in this summary have been drawn from the interview transcripts [6] and focus on beliefs about the purposes of education, and the facilitating factors and barriers [7] to their achievement.

4.2.2.1 Purposes of education

The purposes of education were discussed in the context of many of the forces currently impacting on education and schools, such as technology, globalisation, issues associated with parents/families, and funding – especially federal government funding. Broad economic policy and federal government agendas (previous and current, such as increased accountability) were also noted.

Many interviewees had well-established views about education as a public good, describing the mutuality of the concept. For example, one Minister of Education said:

> The common good means that the more you are engaged, the richer it is – the common good is not a static or a given thing. It requires contributions, and if people don't contribute, and especially people who are most able to contribute, then it becomes weaker …. It's not a charitable sort of thing, not a sense of social obligation or noblesse oblige … It's a sense of contribution rather than donation. (Minister of Education 1)

This sense that education is a community responsibility was emphasised by another Minister of Education who claimed that it is only through government that the public good can be delivered:

> You can't deliver the public good through free enterprise; you can't deliver it through benefactors alone … it has to be driven by ideology, policy and strategy. It can only be dealt with through government … You have to have a common high standard for all, and I don't support the idea that you should take government funds and spend them where you want to. (Minister of Education 2)

With respect to the purposes of schooling, most interviewees had no trouble articulating what, for them, were priority purposes of education. The dominant purposes were public, with concepts such as social cohesion, tolerance, diversity, culture and understanding being used frequently. The following comment is illustrative:

> Competency, creativity, character and citizenship …. Competence is in effect academic knowledge and technological skills … creativity is the new limb of knowledge or skill capability … Character picks up on a whole lot of things – everything from values education to interpersonal skills, conflict resolution …

> Citizenship is that sense of shared social responsibility and a sense in every individual that they can actually contribute positively to the world around them; that they can make a difference and that they are not without power to make a difference. (Minister of Education 3)

Some respondents understood the public purposes of education partly in terms of equity. A CEO of a state system observed:

> (We) are highly focused on equity and support for disadvantaged people. ... We've got a funding formula that provides ... additional resources to lower socio-economic schools. We provide extra resources for indigenous students and students with special needs. … That's been a huge tradition in public education. (CEO state system)

Discussions about the purposes of education were often couched in terms of schooling sectors. Sometimes this was comparative such as promoting (protecting, defending) the virtues of a particular type of school: viz. non-state (e.g., Christian) as opposed to state schools. At other times it was partisan, such as one interviewee talking about the Catholic education sector and public purposes and noting: 'that's core business for us, that's where the Catholic education started.' Others constructed the concept of public purposes as being about public or state/government education and the need to make government schools strong in light of a drift-in students to the non-government sector.

Two Ministers and three Director-Generals refuted comparisons between schooling sectors, arguing that there are certain core (public) values that should be taught by all schools, regardless of the sector to which they belong. For example, the Director-General (Secretary) of one education system was quite clear that all schools held broad social responsibilities in education:

> Regardless of sector, regardless of ideology or faith, or orientation, what are some of the core values that ought reflect the schooling system, or ought underpin this system and be reflected by its practice … We're not having to trade off an investment in the individual strengths of kids with the sort of community and society that we choose to live in and wish to perpetuate. We want to create a society based on values of tolerance, and which celebrates diversity and embraces new ideas and experiences.

4.2.2.2 Facilitating factors and barriers to public purposes

The interviewees identified a number of factors which facilitated and hampered the achievement of public purposes. These varied on the basis of the position occupied.

One Minister for Education clearly identified the struggle between what might be defined as public and private purposes of education[8]:

> There has been a policy tug of war between whether we want education to actually build the person or build the economy; whether education is really about the capabilities of the person and their broad intellectual paraphernalia rather than just creating factory fodder to drive the purposes of industry. … Certainly, the whole idea of materialism and consumerism that emerged in the 70s has anything but abated. … On the other hand, we haven't entirely lost a sense that we want a country where the public goods of fairness and equal opportunity are still part of our social fabric. (Minister of Education 3)

Some of the other barriers identified by interviewees included issues such as enhanced accountabilities of schools, pressures to focus on the academic 'basics', parental aspirations and differential funding disadvantaging state schools. Several interviewees pointed to the impact of state and federal funding and legislation on school policies, and thus on the purposes of schooling. Indeed, one Minister of Education bemoaned the Treasury view of the world that often hinders the pursuit of public purposes:

> We live in a world where economic rationalism has infected all political parties, and most Ministers faced with the intransigence of a Treasury officer will resort to economic arguments … There is no point explaining the common good to Treasury who have hearts of stone… the only thing you can say is there's a skills shortage and we're losing workers to get money out of Treasury … but in one's heart one is arguing about something different. It's just the way you deal … I mean you don't deal with barbarians by explaining poetry. (Minister of Education 2).

The head of a peak parent body believed that constraints on the public purposes of education can be attributed to government-funding levels, preconceived ideas and a lack of time to rebuild. In her view, political short-term thinking, the media's attack on public schools and the lack of parental support and skills exacerbate the situation. With regard to the current circumstances, she observed:

> When we unpack things it's not about what is best for the children but … the bottom dollar. … [We need to] look at it from the other way – of where are we going to spend more, how are we going to invest, because this is going to benefit our whole future and save us in other areas. Until we can turn that mindset around we are still going to be having a lot of problems with public education.

Other forces that were seen to hinder the enactment of public purposes of education included a conservative community, undemocratic schools, competitive and cynical principals with poor networking skills, and lack of government support in terms of

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[8] Here our notions of *democratic*, *individual* and *economic purposes* are strongly evident.

resources and time to rebuild when changes occur. An unsympathetic media also featured strongly as hindrance, such as in the following statement from a state Minister for Education:

> I think public education has been significantly weakened in this country over the last 10 years by a parent exodus, federal government policy and by media … running shock-horror stories all the time.

Interviewees also suggested substantial enactment of the public purposes of education would occur with greater encouragement and support for community involvement in schools, devolution to and support for school and parent communities, and enhanced investment in professional development to build leadership skills and a quality teaching force.

In summary, most interviewees identified a set of core values that transcend the state versus non-state schooling sector divide, with these being about the type of society, or type of citizens we want. The general feeling was that such purposes ought to lead school systems to address disadvantage, and develop the capabilities of young people to live full and productive lives as citizens, workers and members of communities. There was a consensus that a key public purpose of schooling was the development of 'community-mindedness'. However, interviewees felt that there are a number of factors that are working against a greater focus on, and enactment of public purposes, including (a) national political agendas and policies – driven by notions such as competition and choice that seemed to privilege private over public purposes; and (b) accountability agendas, such as national testing, that tended to magnify the importance of some aspects of schooling over others.

4.2.3 Analysis of key policy documents

The documents included in the analysis ranged from strategic system-wide policy documents through to those targeted at the school level. As such, it is difficult to draw definitive conclusions when comparing the various focuses of such a suite of documents, as their purposes and audiences are varied[9]. However, a number of general observations can be made.

Most of the documents analysed are framed by discussions about the changing and challenging contexts within which schools now operate, and the wider social and economic environments for which schools are preparing students to live and work. For example, *State Education 2010* (Queensland) makes mention of family structure and character,

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[9] The following links provide an overview of the documents analysed in three states: Queensland [8]; Tasmania [9] and Victoria [10]. In addition, there is an article written from an analysis of policy texts [26] at the national level.

interculturality, economic change, globalisation, information technology, workforce skills and competitiveness.

However, the documents generally take from these emerging changes and challenges a strong focus on the economic purposes of education. For example, *State Education 2010* notes that:

> there is a need for a redefinition of the purpose of public education that meets the unique challenge posed by the transition of a globalised knowledge economy and society.

Many other policy texts emphasise skills and education development for economic growth and development. Terms such as training, VET-in-Schools, globalisation, knowledge economy, TAFE and lifelong-learning occur frequently, and indeed the latter term is often cast in relation to matching workforce skills to economic need. Even the new national curriculum is justified in terms of its contribution to building human capital. Thus, in announcing the proposed national curriculum Minister Gillard claimed that it would be:

> … future-oriented and will equip our young people with the essential skills, knowledge and capabilities to compete internationally and thrive in the globalised **economies** of the future (Gillard, 2008, our emphasis).

Notwithstanding the strong focus on the economy to be found in contemporary education documents, it is still possible to find ideas and terms that resonate with the public purposes of education. These include diversity, community, interculturality, multiculturalism, social harmony, engaging, equity, partnerships, social and cultural, participation in education, consultation and collaboration, accountability and citizenship. In most documents however, public purpose statements are either separate stand alone statements – almost add-ons – or embedded in other statements, usually ones that involve what might be considered to be private purposes of education.

Ironically, one of the strongest statements about the public purposes of education was found in the Tasmanian *Essential Learnings for All* document, which was based on a commitment to:

- the centrality of values of social justice and equity, inclusion, and equity of access to ensure students with special and/or additional needs have resources for inclusive learning approaches and programs;

- a guiding set of core values: connectedness, resilience, achievement, creativity, integrity, responsibility and equity;

- shared purposes to ensure students and children are learning to: relate, participate and care; live full and healthy lives; create purposeful futures; act ethically; learn and think, know and understand.

These are clearly commitments to the public purposes of education. We say ironically because as is described in the next section (4.2.4), this document and the curriculum developed from it was the subject of an intensely negative media campaign and was eventually abandoned by the Tasmanian government [12].

Our document analysis revealed that the more 'strategic' the document, the more likely it is to contain statements consistent with public purposes. There is considerable agreement and consistency across these policy documents in the language used to describe such purposes, and in these cases they are usually prominently presented as being important in the framing of particular documents/policies. However, we found that as documents become more orientated to the school level, priorities other than public purposes become dominant, at least in terms of what schools need to report at both local community and systemic levels. Thus, while there are many educational purposes, only a very limited number are given priority when there are specific expectations of schools, such as NAPLAN tests. That is, only a few areas are evaluated – and therefore it could be argued, valued–- in any detailed way, and few of these areas relate to the public purposes of education and their enactment. We also identified a rapidity of change in policy documents. There was a sense that educational change can only be successfully delivered through policy pronouncements.

4.2.4 An overview of the media case studies

4.2.4.1 Introduction

In order to examine the ways in which the media understand and represent the purposes of schooling and their enactment, we undertook three case studies:

- a year of reportage and articles relating to the purposes of education in Queensland's *Courier Mail* [11]

- the reportage of the *Essential Learnings* controversy in Tasmania's *Mercury* [12] over a seven year period;

- a historical study of the VCE controversy in Victoria [13] in the late 1980s.

4.2.4.2 The role of the media and public views

The media's role in shaping and leading public views about key social and political issues has been a matter of interest and debate for some time (Balsom, 1999; Wilson & Wilson, 2001). For instance, examining the way in which a Brisbane newspaper reported reforms to education in Queensland in the early 1990s, Thomas (2003) asserted that the journalist and the editor set the agenda and devised a survey that was phrased in such a way to ensure that schooling was

portrayed negatively (i.e., 'What improvements do you think are needed?'), and placed parents as the authoritative voice. Fields has noted:

> The media can and often does decide what is reported, and these stories, in whole or part, are assimilated and accommodated into the emotional fabric and cognitive structures of individual readers … How the media chooses to report and to comment on those events and issues will also have an impact and will inevitably influence the thinking of many. (2005, p. 3)

On the other hand, governments see and use the media in an attempt to shape education policy. Blackmore and Thorpe (2003), for instance, have observed how the Kennett Liberal Government in Victoria used the media to deliberately create a sense of crisis in public education. Similarly, Gannon and Sawer (2007) argue that the Howard Coalition Government and *The Australian* used the 'whole language/phonics debate' to create a sense of panic.

4.2.4.3 Media case studies

Media case study 1: A year of reportage and articles relevant to the purposes of education in Queensland's Courier Mail [11].

Apart from a particular focus on 'school bullying' (clearly a topical issue during the time of this review), the overall concern of education articles in the *Courier Mail* throughout the year was academic achievement and the general success of students attending school. Some focus was also given to the formation of individual character, and the development of strong values systems among the student population. There seemed to be a recognition that these issues are linked and should be the focus of successful schools, in addition to more clearly defined outcomes such as test results. Many of the articles conveyed a sense of community expectation regarding these issues, and also a belief that the better or more desirable schools not only meet these (basic) requirements, but also provide a plethora of opportunities for students' emotional and cultural development.

In general, the examined articles offered a balanced and seemingly unbiased reportage of the issues in question. There were some exceptions, however, when headlines moved from stimulating the interest of the reader to rather obvious cases of sensationalism. For example, the headline 'School bars refugee boy' was used in an article reporting on student numbers in a specific school, and the need for additional staffing. Political perspectives regarding education policy were reported, but only reflected information provided to the media in press releases.

What was apparent in most articles was a lack of comprehensive understanding and analysis of the issues reported. In some instances, experts such as academics or psychologists, or educational consultants were called on for comment, but rarely were their views allowed more than a line or two. As long as the article served a vague 'general interest' criterion then it was

seemingly suitable for publication The only times in-depth analyses occurred was in discussions about individual schools or individual events, such as school expositions.

Media case study 2: Reportage of the Essential Learnings *controversy in Tasmania's* Mercury [12] *over a seven year period*

The case study of Hobart's *Mercury* followed the reportage of one educational issue, the implementation of a major curriculum change – *Essential Learnings* curriculum (ELs) – over a seven year period. This issue was selected because the ELs curriculum had a major focus on the public purposes of education. For example, one of the five ELs mandates was social responsibility, which involved students building social capital, valuing diversity, acting democratically, and understanding the past and creating preferred futures.

One hundred and forty one articles relating to the ELs were published between September 2000 and June 2007. For the first five years there appeared the occasional descriptive, factual and uncritical article about ELs, provided in the main by the Department of Education and schools, but also researched by reporters. In contrast, in the following two years there were three peak periods of reporting. These focused on: (a) the Department of Education's move to mandate assessment and reporting (October 2004); (b) the confused language employed in reporting the ELs (September 2005); and (c) the 'reforms' following the demise of ELs (July 2006).

The *Mercury*'s reporting peaked in September 2005 with 25 of the year's 54 articles written by 13 different reporters. At this time it also became clear that ELs had become 'newsworthy' and that facts were no longer allowed to get in the way of 'a good story'. Reporters appeared to be more concerned with how many strongly worded, usually negative, articles they could get published. In addition, readers were continuously reminded of the negative 'story so far'. In this manner, the impression was given that the 'issue' was growing.

The response of different players to the media onslaught turned out to be totally inadequate and in some cases only added fuel to the ELs 'fire'. The Minister of Education was ill and on leave and the Department was, at best, tardy in addressing the issues raised by the Opposition's Education spokesperson, thus allowing debates to soar further out of control. None of the bodies representing educators seemed to be able to ignore the gag on public servants speaking publicly, even where this would be in the best interests of Tasmanian school children. For example, the Principals' Association and the Tasmanian Parents and Friends' Associations rarely responded to key items reported in the *Mercury*; and the teachers' union took an industrial rather than a professional position in relation to ELs.

In conclusion, ELs started with an eye to the public purposes of education and with the intent to revitalise pedagogy in a way that had never before been attempted. The early years were exemplary and used a model of co-construction to great effect. Thwarted by the increasingly negative *Mercury* reportage, impatience on the part of the bureaucracy and a return to mandated systems of control, coupled with an inability to translate professional language into

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language appropriate for the wider community, saw the ELs process quickly unravel. Whilst the ELs offered the chance to revitalise the secondary sector of education in which so many children were reported to be disaffected, its replacement, the Tasmania Curriculum, has quickly reverted to a top-down, subject-based curriculum, more traditional and simplified to make it more acceptable for teachers, parents and employers.

Media case study 3: Historical study of the VCE controversy in Victoria [13] *in the late 1980s*

The development of the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) in the late 1980s led to an extraordinarily long and intense media debate, that only ended after the 1992 election, in which the Labor Government (that had held office from 1981) was defeated. The debate was represented in all of the print and electronic media across the state. This media case study concentrated on the two daily news papers, the *Age* and the *Herald Sun*.

The debate reported in the newspapers was located in two overlapping arenas: the educational and the political. For the media, forging a relationship between these two arenas created a self-generating, three-year-long news story. In particular, one of the newspapers injected a political agenda by attacking the Labor government. The media's influence on the debate was achieved through the regularity of its reporting and its ideological representation of educational reforms.

The VCE reforms were variously described as 'an exercise in social engineering with political motives', 'hookers give VCE Lessons', 'the VCE, another way of saying shambles', and 'Mother Russia has been at work harder than you may think' (the latter referring to the then Education Minister, Joan Kirner). The letters and opinion pieces in both papers, especially the *Herald Sun*, were heavily weighted in favour of private school and conservative university personnel, and right-wing social and economic commentators.

The experience of the VCE reflected the fact that upper-secondary education in Victoria had a tradition of high autonomy from government. The senior secondary certificate had become an artefact of a client relationship between the universities and grammar schools and their actors. The VCE reforms were an attempt to instil (democratic) public purposes of wider participation and success, and public purposes as articulated in the *Blackburn Report* that initiated the reforms. The democratic (public) purposes were weakly represented in the media, while private purposes, as expressed by curriculum and institutional custodians, were powerfully represented.

Because the actors and their ideologies were highly autonomous, they behaved in different ways. While the more democratically-oriented groups gained the whip hand in the institutional formation of the VCE, they did not control the ideology in its form, discourse or rhetorical formation. As a consequence, the conservative and right-wing actors took the initiative in this area and used agencies that remained autonomous from government and the VCE development processes – the media. This largely, but not totally explains the representations of public and private purposes in regards to the VCE debate within the press.

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It can be claimed that there has never been a localised media educational debate and context quite like that of the 1989–1992 VCE debate in Victoria. The event was significant in its length, intensity, assembly of actors, political overlap, and its multimedia spread. It is difficult to separate the role of the media from those of the numerous actors, including the political actors. This demonstrates how the discourse of education's public purposes is located within a wider political discourse about the nature of society and the principles and ideologies that underpin it.

4.2.4.4 Conclusion

Our conclusions are similar to those reached by other Australian and British educational media analysts. For example, focusing on the 'literacy wars', Snyder (2008) observed that journalists and editors working for *The Australian* newspaper – which is in the same Murdoch News Limited 'stable' as the *Courier Mail*, *Mercury* and *Herald Sun* – presented complex educational theories simplistically. Similarly, Blackmore and Thomson (2004) found that in reportage concerning school principals, the British media portrayed them as mavericks, stars, or failures, with little attention to the socio-economic factors of the schools and communities in which they worked.

Warmington and Murphy (2005, p. 290) have suggested that media coverage is due as much 'to custom and format as [it is] to shaping by [an] explicit agenda', with news being constructed as a contest between stakeholders to secure audience interest. Where certain stakeholders are able to exert undue influence in the media, as happened in the case of the VCE controversy, they are able to have a real impact on a policy's form and discourse, even when they do not have control of its institutional formation. As we, too, found, once an educational topic becomes 'an issue' for the media, it often adheres to the patterns of the news cycle, with an emphasis on sensationalism to sustain audience attention.

However, Rodwell (2009 & forthcoming) concludes, as we do, that while the media can help create public outrage and spectacle, it would be wrong to exaggerate its influence. Other factors, such as inadequate educational planning and implementation strategies are as much responsible for the demise of initiatives which support the public purposes of education and their enactment as is the media.

It would be hard to argue from our case studies that particular purposes of education are being promoted over others in the media. Indeed, all purposes are evident in the analysed articles, with possibly greater emphasis on democratic and economic purposes than individual ones. A more precise description would be that of a media that responds, in the main, uncritically to educational matters raised by others. Generally speaking, journalists reporting on education issues in print media outlets appear to lack an in-depth understanding of education policy or of the issues themselves. Certainly there seems to be no sustained focus and/or development of

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prominent educational issues of the day. We are left with the clear impression that politics and ideology influence educational reportage in Australia far more than does research/evidence.

Our media case studies related to the public purposes of education and their enactment have raised a number of questions that need further investigation:

- Is it possible that there are 'parallel but different universes' between the public perception of what is happening in an education system generated through media representation, and what is actually happening in schools?

- How can schools achieve a greater focus on public purposes when community perceptions about education are so powerfully shaped by media commentary?

- On the assumption that the media does not accept any responsibility for the consequences of its reportage, is 'managing the media' a critical part of the whole experience and, if so, what form(s) should it take?

- What is the public purpose of the media in regards to schooling and education institutions?

4.3 An overview of the school-based case studies

4.3.1 Introduction

We undertook a number of in-depth, qualitative case studies of primary schools in order to examine some of the ways in which the purposes of schooling are understood and enacted in school settings. Since the research project was seeking to illuminate public purposes of schooling, the project team, with the help of four state AGPPA affiliates, identified government primary schools in capital cities which were likely to be consistent with the criteria for public purposes as identified in Part 3. Each school was approached through its principal and a process of buy-in was negotiated. Longitudinal case studies of these schools were then undertaken, with data collected from:

- in-depth interviews with the principal of the schools, parents, and teachers;

- focus groups of teachers;

- analysis of school documents, policies, newsletters, magazines and so on;

- observation of staff and parent meetings;

- observations of pupils in their classrooms and in and around the school; and,

- observation of school artifacts, including student work.

The identification of the purposes of schooling from this mass of data was based on the conceptual framework described in Parts 2 and 3 of this report. We did not only refer to the **stated** purposes made by official school texts, educators, or members of the school community, but also to the **implicit**, embedded or assumed purposes that school policy and practices revealed.

This overview of the case studies first provides a brief description of each school (the full case study can be accessed by following the link provided) followed by a summary of the dominant purposes of schooling, and then strategies for the enactment of these purposes, drawn from the state school case studies[10]. In light of our findings, a concluding section re-examines the three-fold conceptualisation of the purposes of education (outlined in Part 2 of this report) that links the strategies for enactment of the purposes to communities of professional learners, and reinforces the importance of the need for schools to give priority to the public purposes of schooling and the sorts of strategies which enable these to be enacted.

4.3.2 The schools

4.3.2.1 Case study 1: Lansdowne Crescent [14]

A Hobart, Tasmania, inner-suburban high SES (Socio-Economic Status) school built in 1910 but recently redeveloped. The school has a growing student population of 335, mainly Australian children. It chooses to only take enrolments from within its own area. The school has spacious grounds, which include vegetable gardens, commissioned art work, outdoor furniture and playgroup equipment. Before- and after-school care is available. The school has a male principal who has been at the school for six years and a very active parent body. The school's motto is 'Respect for One and All'. On the basis of standardised test results, it is above state and national expectations for like schools academically.

4.3.2.2 Case study 2: Southbank [15]

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[10] There are six school case studies – four government schools and two Catholic schools. At the time of undertaking the school case studies it was hoped that the non-government sector would be fully involved in the project. Unfortunately, this sector later declined to be involved in the nation-wide survey and so, to be consistent with our complete data gathering set, we have not included these school case studies in the following overview. However, you will note from the links in 4.3.2.5 that these schools are very similar to the four state schools in their focus on the public purposes of education. The Catholic schools were identified following recommendations by state and non-state principal representatives.

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An Adelaide, South Australia, inner-suburban, low but slowly changing to middle SES school built in 1880. The student population numbers 241 with a large proportion of new Australian arrivals. ESL students make up 60 per cent of enrolments, many of whom are refugees, 20 per cent have disabilities, and 15 per cent are indigenous. The school is not zoned and experiences high transience or 'churn factor'. It has a before- and after-school centre and large grounds. The female principal has been at the school for seven years. The school's motto is 'Working Together for a Quality Education' and has a peace code program firmly in place. It always publicises its successes. On the basis of standardised test results, it is similar to like schools academically

4.3.2.3 Case study 3: Eastfield [16]

An Adelaide, South Australia, inner-suburban high SES school built in 1858 and situated in beautiful grounds. Enrolment is 280 comprising mainly Australian students. The school has a flexible enrolment policy, despite being zoned and provides before- and after-school care. The female principal has been at the school for five years. School programs include the International Baccalaureate and a very strong emphasis on sustainability. The school is seen as a 'community school' and enjoys excellent parent participation. On the basis of standardised test results, it is above the level for like schools academically

4.3.2.4 Case study 4: Bluehills [17]

A Brisbane, Queensland, inner-suburban mixed SES school built in 1890. Its grounds only cover a small area but it has its own swimming pool, arts centre and permaculture garden. It has 260 students, 25 per cent of whom comprise 35 different cultural groups. This change has occurred mainly as a result of having recently opened its doors to waves of refugee migrant children. The school is zoned. Parental involvement is high and productive partnerships are well established with other schools and community organisations. The female principal has been at the school for nine years. The school's self-developed Big 6 Value Set (community, resilience, integrity, opportunity, respect, embracing diversity) permeates the school's operation. On the basis of standardised test results, it is similar to like schools academically.

4.3.2.5 Case studies 5 and 6

Two case studies of Catholic primary schools were also conducted and these can be found at the following links – St Porters Queensland [18] and Harvester Catholic Primary School Victoria [19]. At the time of undertaking the school case studies it was hoped that the non-government sector would be fully involved in the project. Unfortunately, this

sector later declined to be involved in the nation-wide survey and so, to be consistent with our complete data gathering set, we have not included these school case studies in the following overview. However, you will note from the links that these schools are very similar to the four state schools in their focus on the public purposes of education.

4.3.3 Purposes of schooling

Each case study provides a rich description of the structures and processes of the school, its formal and informal curriculum and its culture. When compared, there are obvious differences in priority and approach, but a content analysis across the four government primary school case studies suggests that six broad purposes of schooling dominate. These have been identified from the **stated** purposes that we read in official school texts, or statements from educators and members of the school community, and also from the **implicit** purposes that our observations of school policy and practices revealed. They are that schooling should promote:

- **A love of learning for its own sake** – including lifelong learning, learning to learn, and a passion for learning;

- **Student self-efficacy** – including resilience, integrity, persistence, excellence, optimism, and the ability to embrace change;

- **Student social-efficacy** – including trust, care, collaboration, respect, and the capacity to nurture and sustain relationships;

- **Student skills in literacy and numeracy** – including capabilities for communication through various media, and as the building blocks for other knowledges;

- **Equity, social justice and democratic equality** – including capabilities for democratic participation as local and global citizens, inclusiveness, valuing diversity and intercultural understanding;

- **Community development** – including community connections, community building, community responsibility and sustainability.

Using our understandings from Part 3, some of these are self-evidently public purposes of education, such as equity, social justice and democratic participation. Others however, require a context in order for a judgment to be made: they could serve private or public purposes, depending on the ways in which they are enacted. It is to that question we now turn.

4.3.4 Enactment of purposes

Looking across the case studies, it is clear that the purposes identified in 4.3.3 above are not pursued in isolation from each other. They are enacted through a range of strategies, each of which usually contributes to a number of purposes. We found however, that there seems to be four broad groupings of strategies.

4.3.4.1 Culture of the school

In each of the four schools, it is clear that special attention is being paid to the development of a school culture and environment which, we will argue, supports the achievement of public purposes of schooling. There are a number of elements of this culture. First, there is a concern to create a culture of *inclusion*, where every effort is made to ensure that difference is acknowledged and respected, and all get a fair go and are treated with dignity and respect. Second, the schools are committed to establishing values which create a *safe and supportive* environment, such as trust, care, and compassion. Third, the schools are organised and run *democratically*. This means that staff are involved in decision-making; student voice is taken seriously in relation to all aspects of school life, including curriculum work; and parents feel a part of the school and its decisions through communication and involvement in school life. Finally, the focus is on the *whole child,* including the physical, social, emotional as well as academic aspects of learning. There is an expectation that all will have the opportunity, and will be supported to participate fully.

The key factor in the development of a school culture based on public purposes of education seems to be the emphasis on the health of the whole community. This does not imply a lack of care for the individual. Rather, it suggests that mutuality is a key component of a healthy community. For example, in relation to the value of 'care', the principal of Eastfield Primary School observed:

> One of our things is about caring, but what we've had to confront is caring doesn't mean that I just care about you. You actually have to care about me and care about the other people in this community. (Principal interview, p.5, 2008)

4.3.4.2 Leadership

It is clear that quality of leadership is central to the establishment of the sort of culture described in this section, specifically leadership which both models the desired culture and works hard to sustain it. The best way we found to describe the kind of leadership that operates in the case-study schools is as the leadership of a *community of professional learners*. This seems to have a number of features. There is a commitment to: (a) continuous professional learning, where staff are always engaged individually and

collectively in inquiring into the problems, dilemmas, concerns and issues that face them in their professional life, in systematic, critical and rigorous ways; (b) sharing insights from professional reading or outcomes of inquiry and research with colleagues; (c) evidence-based policy making, using the new knowledge gained through professional development and inquiry; (d) de-privatising teaching practice, so that there is an openness about sharing practice (including problems and mistakes) with colleagues in transparent and collaborative ways; and (e) using the school's agreed purposes and goals as benchmarks against which to evaluate policy and practice.

4.3.4.3 Community

Schools have always used their local communities as resources for learning. This was certainly the case with the case-study schools. But the connection with community often went beyond that to create an interesting two way relationship. One way in which this happened was when schools brought the community into the schools for pedagogical purposes. This was where the starting point for some learning was community experience and knowledge, usually in the form of members of the community sharing their expertise with students, sometimes in the form of using valued 'funds of knowledge' (Moll et al., 1992) which reside in the community. In this way, students came to see the curriculum, not as a disembodied practice unconnected to their own lives, but as an experience which builds from and values their own cultural capital.

Another way was when the school was used as a community resource, beyond its prime function as an institution to educate the young. For example, in Southbank Primary School, the rich resources of the staff and school facilities were used by parents and other members of the community – many of whom do not have English as a first language – as a social meeting space, to attain advice on matters relating to welfare, trauma counselling, translation services, and food and clothing support.

In these ways, the four schools, to a greater or lesser extent, clearly made a major contribution to community building. They did this not only by developing the 'capacities for social practice' of their students through the formal curriculum, but also by being a resource for the community. This is obviously a powerful public purpose.

4.3.4.4 Curriculum

All schools are required to follow an accredited school curriculum. And yet the curricula of schools, even within the same system, can vary markedly. This is because of the way in which the curriculum is interpreted. The interpretation has much to do with the purposes to which the school subscribes. There is a similarity across the four case-study schools in relation to the curriculum which, we will argue, stems from their commitment

to the public purposes of schooling. For example, the schools commonly enunciated clear goals for learning, carefully tracked the progress of students through their time at school, used cross-disciplinary and thematic approaches to learning, promoted intercultural understanding, and saw the curriculum as one way to achieve a more just society in and through education.

One of the most obvious similarities was the emphasis on a strong whole-school focus which permeated everything that happened in the school and its community. These were always public purposes, in that they referred to goals or aspirations that were about benefits for the whole community and not only the individuals within it. For example, for Southbank Primary the theme was peace and global citizenship; for Eastfield Primary it was sustainability; and for Bluehills Primary it was the 'Big 6', described by the principal in the following way:

> A core set of values, known as the 'Big 6' [community, resilience, integrity, opportunity, respect, embracing diversity] drives the school and defines expectations of all members of the school community, including students and teachers. … We know through the wisdom gained from our experience that a strong relationship exists between social outcomes and learning outcomes.

4.3.5 Observations about the public purposes of education

In 4.3.4 we analysed some of the strategies, common to the four case-study schools, which are being used to achieve the purposes of schooling identified in 4.3.3. In this section we will argue that it is the means by which these purposes are being addressed that constructs them as dominantly public purposes, and in so doing we will make some general observations about public purposes of education. We will use as a reference point for this discussion the definition of public purposes as set out in Part 2 of this report, viz., that public purposes are designed to benefit the society as a whole.

First, most stated purposes cannot automatically be designated as public or private – it is the language used to talk about them, and the strategies employed to 'deliver' them, that reveal the intention. For example, it could be argued that most of the purposes described in the case studies are neutral in terms of 'publicness' – they only come to life when they are seen in the context of school policy and everyday practice. For example, 'student skills in literacy and numeracy' could be designated as a 'private' purpose of education if they became the major focus of that education, so serving to narrow the curriculum by marginalising, say, citizenship capabilities, or if used to compare schools and students for the institution's market benefit. On the other hand, if, as with the case-study schools, they are seen as important building blocks of knowledge that enable a broader and more critical citizenry, and they are not taught at the exclusion of other important areas of knowledge, but rather contribute to these other areas, then they clearly have a public

purpose. The principal of Lansdowne Primary School, a school committed to public purposes, was aware of these links when he said:

> The success our children achieve is due not only to increased teacher capacity and focused teaching but also the breadth of opportunities children are offered that relate their learning to the world around them. … We have some exceptionally bright children here who read and write very well but they aren't always able to work with or listen to others. These children will never be good citizens unless we can help them develop these missing social skills. Part of our success comes from our ability to do this and, interestingly, it results in even better reading and writing.

Second, purposes of education are enacted through each of the three modalities described in Part 2: the structure and processes, curriculum, and culture of education systems. However, if the strategies proposed and enacted in one or more of the modalities are inconsistent with the stated purposes, then the purpose will be diluted at best or at worst not delivered at all. It is the responsibility of the school to ensure this consistency. So too should education authorities and the government realise that a rhetorical commitment to public purposes is insufficient if the policies they develop are contradictory to the stated goals. For example, in three of the case-study schools, the teachers were concerned about the fact that the NAPLAN test, now that it has become a high-stakes test, was causing them to 'teach to the test', and was therefore narrowing the curriculum in ways that contradicted the stated public purposes contained in the *Melbourne Goals of Schooling* (2008) [25] to which the schools were committed.

Third, the enactment strategies in the case studies suggest that there are some pre-conditions for the delivery of public purposes. Thus the highest importance is given to the cultural modalities of the school, such as trust, respect, collaboration, care and professionalism which in turn make possible an open, transparent and democratic culture within which it is possible to foster strong community relationships and a broad curriculum. These community and professional conditions enable genuine evidence-based policy and evaluation. In brief, the strategies that best fulfil the public purposes [27] of education confirm our concept of a community of professional learners.

Finally, the three preceding observations about the purposes of education, drawn from our case studies, demonstrate that a school's public purposes need to be the subject of ongoing discussion and debate within the school community, as they should be across education systems. It is important that they become the touchstone against which policy and practice is judged, and that they are prominent and referred to consistently. The case-study schools 'marketed' their public purposes through mottos, school 'branding', newsletters and the media. In this way, the private purpose strategies of 'marketing' were colonised to represent public purposes in the school community and beyond.

4.3.6 Conclusion

It is useful to describe some striking similarities between our findings and those from the recent comprehensive and independent reviews of primary (Alexander, 2009) and secondary (Pring, et al, 2009) education in UK. All call for a broad vision of education in which there is a profound respect for the whole person (not just the narrowly conceived private purposes of 'intellectual excellence' or 'skills for economic prosperity'), irrespective of ability or cultural and social background, and a broader vision of learning, and in which the learning contributes to a more just and cohesive society. More specifically, both reviews believe that little attention has been given to the cultural and communal significance of schools and their pupils. Schools need to be seen as not only communities unto themselves but also as being **in** communities, with considerable communal potential.

Both reviews agree that these broad purposes of education should drive rather than follow curriculum, teaching, assessment, schools and policy. For too long the purposes of education have been confused and tokenistic. Too often, purposes begin grandly in one, usually public purpose direction while the curriculum follows a much narrower, usually private purpose path. Measures of success must reflect this broader range of educational purposes, not simply those which are easy to measure or which please certain stakeholders. The quality of schooling needs to be judged in relation to all it does, not just its test scores.

In relation to the strategies for the fulfilment of the public purposes of education, both reviews call for the redistribution of decision-making power in order for there to be greater room for the voice of the learner, for the professional expertise of the teacher and for the concerns of other stakeholders. It is argued that there is a growing respect in schools for children as agents and valuable citizens in their own right, and that children who feel empowered are also more likely to be better and happier learners.

There is a demand in both studies for the creation of strongly collaborative local learning systems, or communities of professional learners. Top-down control and edict needs to be replaced by professional empowerment and accountability. This emphasis on the need for greater professional empowerment is supported by Hyman (2005) who worked for 10 years at the heart of UK politics, including six years as Tony Blair's chief speech writer. In 2003 he left to work in an inner-London government comprehensive high school. He became fascinated with the contrast between these two work situations. What he found was a chasm between politics and schools, between a job which demanded quick delivery and one where there was no quick delivery. Dealing with 24-hour media and demonstrating decisive government was entirely the wrong approach for convincing professionals. Political strategies are based on momentum, conflict and novelty, whereas

schools require empowerment, partnership and consistency. Hyman (2005) concluded, as we do, that for lasting change to happen in schools, politicians need to show more humility and bring the professionals on-board.

It is not just former political advisors in UK who are concerned about top-down political control and edict. In 2008, four eminent British educators – Professors Frank Coffield, Stephen Ball, Richard Taylor and Sir Peter Scott – wrote to *The Independent*, one of Britain's most respected newspapers. Their words resonate with the Australian experience:

> We have the same objectives as the government in wanting to offer a first-class education and training to all and, in particular, to narrow the attainment gap between the most and least advantaged. We have, however, become increasingly dismayed by Ministers who are intent on permanent revolution in every aspect of the education system: in so acting, they demonstrate a deep lack of trust in the professional education community. It is not only the torrent of new policy that rains down on each sector, the constant changes in direction and the automatic rubbishing of any discomforting evidence by Ministers: it's also the failure of successive Ministers to appreciate that reform has to be accompanied by continuity if the stability of our educational institutions and the high quality of their courses are to be preserved. We need a more consultative, democratic and inclusive way of developing and enacting policy for all the public services ... We have come independently to the same conclusion, namely that government policy is no longer the solution to the difficulties we face but our greatest problem. (Letter to *The Independent*, 2 June 2008)

Finally, language matters. The words we use shape our thinking. The private purpose language seeping through government pronouncements – although not, thankfully, the day to day life of our best practice case-study schools – of 'performance management and control' has regrettably come to dominate educational deliberation and planning. This language includes terms such as measurable 'inputs' and 'outputs', 'performance indicators' and 'audits', 'targets' and 'curriculum delivery', 'customers' and 'deliverers', 'efficiency gains' and 'bottom lines'. Our results strongly suggest a need to return to an educational and public purpose language.

4.4 An overview of the results of a national survey of primary school principals

As another way of answering the question about how the purposes of schooling (and specifically public purposes) are understood and enacted in Australian primary schools, in 2009 we surveyed all the principals in Australian state primary schools. Our purpose here was to test some of the understandings we had developed through the literature reviews, policy analyses and school case studies, with a wider and more varied group of principals. We were particularly interested to learn how principals understood the concept of educational purposes, and, more specifically, public purposes; what strategies they use to enact these purposes; and what they think are the factors which facilitate and hinder the achievement of these purposes. Principals are influential figures in schools, and their views about priorities and strategies, successes and failures are important. We believe that when their responses are aggregated, it provides a valuable perspective from which to consider the purposes of education.

The following is a summary of our findings [21a]; and the following is a summary of the data [21b].

4.4.1 The national survey [20]

The survey was developed from the earlier conceptual, analytical and case study work undertaken in 2007 and 2008, which was described in previous parts of this report. A battery of items was generated, mainly framed around the three purposes of education and their associated modalities as identified in Parts 2 and 3, with the aim of revealing (a) *the level of importance of particular purposes of education* and (b) *the level or extent of enactment of those purposes in practice*. The survey was designed so that principals rated these two notions on a five-point scale of importance from 'very low' to 'very high'. The draft items were reviewed and refined by the research team on a number of occasions before wider critique was provided by groups of principals.

4.4.1.1 Survey description

The 2009 survey comprised 71 items of a closed format and three items of an open-ended format. The first eight of the closed items addressed bio-demographic information, such as school size, gender, and length of service as a principal. The remaining closed items (9 to 71) required participants to rate firstly the *importance* they ascribed to particular purposes of education and strategies to achieve these purposes, and secondly the degree to which they believed these purposes and strategies were *enacted* in their school. The set of closed strategy items was clustered into a number of sub-sections, including items related

to *purposes of schooling* and *strategies to achieve purposes of schooling*, with the latter set of items being framed around issues such as the school curriculum, parents and community, and school organisation. The survey concluded with some open-ended items, allowing respondents to expand on a range of matters, including comments relating to any factors which they saw as hindering or enabling the achievement of specific purposes in schools. It was anticipated that the survey would take about 20 minutes to complete online.

4.4.1.2 Survey distribution and return rate

The national survey was distributed in electronic format via membership databases provided by the AGPPA and its affiliated state and territory bodies. In all, 1071 completed surveys were received, representing an approximate 25 per cent response rate. Some of the factors that mitigated against a higher response rate included inaccurate email address lists, slow download speeds in some remote areas, and the fact that many principals had more pressing activities at the time, such as completing national infrastructure applications. A majority of respondents provided written comments [23] via the final three open-ended items. These were categorised under a number of broad headings.

4.4.1.3 Demographic responses

Of the respondents, male and female primary school principals were equally represented nationally, although males were more highly represented in Queensland and Western Australia, and females in South Australia, Victoria and the Territories. Schools were predominantly primary (90 per cent), with a small number of combined primary and secondary schools (6 per cent). Respondents were drawn from schools of a variety of sizes, ranging from those with 50 or fewer students, to some of 750 or more students. The larger states – New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland – tended to draw from the full range of school sizes, with smaller education systems such as Tasmania and the Territories being less evenly spread. The vast majority of principals (88 per cent) were aged 41 years or older (65 per cent were aged 51 or older), with almost half (44 per cent) having 11 or more years experience as a principal. Over half had been in their current school for more than four years.

4.4.2 Summary of analysis of survey items

The highest scoring items for the level of importance of both *purposes* and *strategies* are clearly aligned with what we would describe as public purposes. By contrast, the cluster of lowest scoring items were aligned more closely with private purposes. That is, this group of

primary principals are clear that (democratic) public purposes ought be at the top of the agenda in determining what primary schools should be aiming towards, and that (economic and individual) private purposes should have a lesser focus.

On the other hand, principals reported that there was a big difference between what were clearly public purposes of schooling – such as 'helping students develop a love of learning' and 'contributing to a sustainable society' – and the enactment of some of these (See Table 4 [21a]). Indeed, the five items where there was the greatest difference between level of importance and level of enactment were all public purposes of education. Some of these differences are accounted for by matters external to the school (e.g., lack of adequate funding) while others are matters perhaps more relevant at the local school level.

When the level of enactment was compared with the level of importance of purposes and strategies (See Table 6 [21a]), the highest differences related to items which did not embody public purposes. Apart from the survey item 'make schools accountable for social outcomes', there was no sense of public purpose in the other items. Even for the 'social outcomes' item, several of the open-ended comments suggested that this was more about principals feeling their schools were being required to 'pick up' major responsibilities for the social and emotional development of many young people, often beyond the level of resources of the school. Some of these responsibilities were seen to be in areas that might otherwise be expected to be either the role of, or managed in partnership with parents or community agencies. Many principals in the open-ended section of the survey suggested that government schools are carrying the dominant load in this regard in comparison with non-government schools.

The open-ended comments by principals on the survey provided some useful elaborations of this data. Overall, there were two very powerful messages that emerge from the item responses and these comments. First, there was inadequate resource support for students with socio-economic disadvantage and/or learning needs. The government schooling sector in particular is seen to be carrying significant responsibilities regarding these students, without adequate or equitable funding. Two illustrative comments were:

> Funding schools on a basis of need should ensure that all schools receive adequate funding to meet the needs of their students and those with additional needs and challenges receive additional funding accordingly.

> [There is] … inadequate funding of differential support for students with special educational, social, emotional or welfare needs. Schools that cater for 'more difficult to educate' students need to be recognised and funded to continue this work.

The second message relates to concerns about the current focus on, and negative impact of, the national-testing regime and associated accountabilities, such as NAPLAN. It is clear

that principals think that the current assessment, testing and accountability agenda is taking on a higher prominence than should be the case. For example:

> League tables and comparisons … that [do] not take into account the clientele of a school will create angst, division, disparity between schools … and, ultimately destroy the morale of the teaching service.

> Schooling is being distorted by a national testing agenda – the curriculum is narrowed, opportunities for students to actively participate in curriculum decisions are narrowed. … disadvantaged students and communities are funded so inadequately that these students have limited opportunities for success.

4.4.3 Data reduction: factor analysis ([21a] & [21b])

Factor analyses were used to produce a smaller and more manageable number of variables to deal with, rather than the larger number of individual survey items (i.e., several items were clustered into one or more variables). In this case, the factor analyses employed the principal component analysis extraction with varimax rotation. The results of the factor analysis were considered firstly in terms of the items related to the *purposes of schooling*, then to the items related to the *strategies to achieve those purposes*.

4.4.3.1 Purposes of education

Four clusters or groupings of items (factors) were found to account for 60 per cent of the variance. These were assigned labels (variables) as follows:

1. Student love of learning, and creating responsible citizenry for democracy and common good (33 per cent)
2. Community development and resource (11 per cent)
3. Social justice (8 per cent)
4. Sorting for employment and the economy (8 per cent)

Using our earlier analysis, factors 1–3 can be described as public purposes of education. Thus, it is clear that the respondents gave priority to public purposes of education: over 50 per cent of the variance is accounted for in the three identified public purpose factors (i.e., these three factors are mainly responsible for the differences, contributing over 50 per cent of the statistical difference); and factor 4 is a constrained public purpose since it contributes to both the public and private realms. This underlines the importance of public purposes to the respondent principals.

4.4.3.2 Strategies to achieve purposes

Six clusters or groupings of items (factors) were found to account for 52 per cent of the variance. These were assigned labels (variables) as follows:

1. Foster professional and student trust and collaboration (24 per cent)
2. Value and resource difference and disadvantage (8 per cent)
3. Community resource, development and involvement (6 per cent)
4. Emphasise diversity within and between schools (5 per cent)
5. Student involvement in curriculum (4 per cent)
6. National 'basics' tests to sort students and schools (5 per cent)

Using the framework elaborated in Parts 2 and 3 of this report, factors 1 to 5 are public purposes, while factor 6 contributes to a private purpose of schooling. Again, public purposes dominate, with the five public purpose factors accounting for most of the variance. The sixth factor accounts for only 5 per cent of the variance. That is, overall, as for the *purposes of education* above, *strategies to achieve those purposes* that are consistent with public purposes over private purposes are given priority.

4.4.4 Discussion

Findings from the national survey of government primary school principals in Australia point to tensions between what principals believe ought to be the purposes of education and how these might be achieved, and the realities of what is actually happening. It could be argued that the results indicate a shift away from public purposes of education to those more aligned with private purposes.

The open-ended responses indicate that barriers 'external' to the school dominate (summary of these responses [23]). Over 80 per cent of responses referred to factors such as inadequate resourcing and support, unsympathetic politicians and bureaucracies, expectations to solve broader societal problems, and a negative media as contributing to an uneven and unfair playing field, especially in comparison to the non-government schooling sector. Principals also identify challenges in relation to successfully catering for a diverse student population and facilitating a socially just, equitable, cohesive and inclusive society.

A good number of the factors facilitating public purposes are also related to 'external' issues. However, there are some, such as *partnerships and diversity* and *quality teaching and learning* that are largely the remit of principals, teachers and school communities. It suggests that many schools are 'managing' the 'external' barriers so that they are able to ensure the public purposes of education are not swamped by private purposes. In these schools, principals are able to work within the existing constraints towards public purpose goals. Our case study work with a number of schools confirms this – the key values

driving such schools and their day-to-day practices are highly consistent with public purposes of education. In these schools, principals accommodate 'external' demands within the existing culture, without allowing them to dominate the values and practices of public purposes.

However, the responses in this survey suggested that many principals are angry with and even despairing of the lack of fairness they claim abounds in the management and treatment of public education in Australian society. Indeed, the open-ended responses of many principals drew stark contrasts between the government and non-government sectors. In considering this point it should be noted that the survey made no attempt to overtly draw distinctions across the schooling sectors, nor even invite respondents to make such comments about such discrepancies. However, the extent of the comments in this regard cannot be ignored. Many of them reflected views that highlight two particular issues.

The first issue relates to what the respondents considered to be unfair funding patterns across the schooling sectors. One principal's comment is illustrative of this:

> A huge resourcing divide still continues to exist between government and private school sectors. A more serious attempt must be made to ensure all students have access to the same educational opportunities, with facilities that are of equal standard.

Even a change of government at federal level in Australia a few years ago – to one with claims of social democratic principles – has seen no change in the funding arrangements for government (state) and non-government (private) schools. Late in its first term the Labor government has established a committee to review these, and it is to be hoped that this will address some of the current inequities. In the meantime, schools and school leaders might draw on the sorts of strategies adopted by those in our case-study schools (described in 4.3) to manage shortfalls in funding and retain a focus on public purposes.

The second issue related to the student 'clientele' present in the respective government and non-government schools. Many respondents saw that government schools enrolled 'all-comers' and particularly catered for those from more challenging socio-economic backgrounds as compared with the non-government school sector. As one respondent commented:

> Public schools are inclusive. We do not judge students on entry, rather we accept every child who walks through the door as an individual who has individual educational needs.

There is no doubt that many government schools 'manage' this challenge, and indeed, it emphasises the very essence of the public purposes of schooling, where equity and social

justice resonate. But it is a matter that the government's current funding review panel, referred to above, needs to consider.

There were some differences in the survey relating to a range of demographic variables, particularly school SES and size, and the experience and length of time of their principals. In most cases, these differences, while being statistically significant, were so small that only tentative conclusions might be drawn from them. They do, however, point to the need for some more detailed and focused research in this area, because they carry significant policy implications if confirmed. For example, it appears that larger schools may have difficulty in matching policies of public purposes with effective strategies to achieve those purposes, especially ones in relation to fostering trust and collaboration and student involvement in the curriculum. Conversely, middle-sized schools (401–500) appear to have the most success with the enactment of these kinds of public purposes. If further research were to confirm this finding, it has significant policy implications, especially for those states that have very large primary schools.

In addition, the data suggests that principals' experience and time in individual schools are important variables in helping to explain attitudes towards the pursuit of public purpose goals and strategies in Australian primary schools. From the survey, it appears that experienced principals who have spent more than eight or more years in a particular school, may be more likely than their less experienced counterparts to emphasise the importance and enactment of public purposes and strategies (especially those related to social justice), and to feel greatest dissatisfaction when enactment fails to achieve these expectations. Our earlier results (e.g., Mulford & Edmunds, 2009) suggest that it takes time as a principal to wean oneself from what are perceived as 'system demands' and be able to stand on one's own two professional feet. It may be that support for and enactment of the public purposes of education are more likely with experience, both as a principal and in one's school. The connection between experience and the public purposes of education is an important public policy issue which needs more exploration, not least because of the age profile of the Australian principalship, with a large proportion retiring in the near future. In particular, there are implications for schools in highly disadvantaged communities and/or small isolated rural communities, where there is a much greater turnover in the principalship than in more affluent communities in metropolitan areas.

4.4.5 Conclusion

Overall, the results of this national survey are negative if we believe schools do have roles and responsibilities in pursuing the public purposes of education. The research summarised here provides evidence that only a limited number of educational purposes are actually given priority and support in Australia, certainly as reported by the principals in the government primary schools involved in this survey. There are clearly tensions between

what principals believe should be the public purposes of education and what their schools are able to deliver. Many of the barriers to achieving greater focus on public purposes are seen to be related to factors external to the school, and include such issues as government policy decisions, differential funding and resourcing across school sectors, and emerging community and societal factors. In making this reference to 'external' barriers, it is important to be mindful that there are schools that successfully manage these barriers and maintain their focus on public purposes of education. There are leadership implications here.

Furthermore, despite the rhetoric in policy documents and policy maker pronouncements about what is important in education, the policy focus remains on only a narrow band of school activities. NAPLAN tests results are the only data that is posted on the MySchool website, which purports to indicate the quality of a school. This suggests a policy mindset which is ignorant of the broader range of capabilities an education system aiming to achieve public purposes aspires to. While some of these may be more challenging to evaluate than is possible with standardised test instruments for reading and writing, alternative approaches *do* exist. A governments which is serious about the public purposes of education would seek to develop and trial accountability mechanisms which broaden rather than narrow the rich possibilities of schooling. We should measure what we value, not value what we think we can easily measure.

We conclude with the thoughts of two survey respondents, which illustrate and summarise many of the issues raised by the survey results. They present as matters warranting debate among policy makers and practitioners, especially if we are to return to a situation where schools are seen as institutions which contribute to the well being of our society as a whole, and not simply as places where students earn credentials:

> Our history will reflect a time of wasted opportunity and social divisiveness due largely to our failed approach to schooling and the provision of education in the second half of the 20th century. Unless we agree as a nation to bring together all those involved in policy making, and develop a bipartisan approach to the provision and funding of education, Australia as a nation will continue to slide further down the list of advanced countries. How can we possibly expect to remain a highly advanced futuristic nation with our current haphazard, highly political approach to education?

> Narrow understandings of the nature of schooling in the 21st century on the behalf of politicians, influential community members and educational bureaucracies continue to hamper the work of schools, the learning of young people and the development of productive community/school partnerships. … Schools must be better resourced to manage the diversity of students and communities. We have 21st century needs, but are funded on a model that does not understand the nature of our student need. Inadvertently, schools then become the scapegoats for all that is amiss in society. Schools can do better for

the common good – no doubt about it – but we need to be resourced and supported to respond to contemporary needs, not those of a bygone era.

4.5 The gap between aspiration and enactment

It is clear that there is a commitment in the education community to the public purposes of education – from policy makers, principals and teachers. However, it is just as apparent that there are many barriers to the achievement of public purposes. Policy makers told us how external factors made it difficult to go beyond rhetorical commitments to public purposes, and principals told us that a lack of funding and the imposition of contradictory policy dictates inevitably creates a gap between the aspiration and enactment of public purposes. While the case-study schools demonstrated that it is possible to work against this dominant policy grain, it was also clear that this work was made all the harder by these contradictions.

Our research has demonstrated that if the public purposes of education are to be taken seriously, there needs to be an alignment between the stated goals and intentions of education policy and the strategies that are designed to deliver these. This suggests the need for there to be a critical scrutiny of policies, programs and practices at the level of both systems and schools by educators and the general community. If the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals* is to be taken seriously, then the public purpose goals it sets out should be used as the benchmark for assessment. The sorts of questions that might be asked of policies, programs and practices would relate to the extent to which they contribute to the wider social good or community benefit. These would include consideration about whether they:

- Help to develop capacities for democratic participation

- Contribute to the health of the whole system

- Include rather than exclude

- Support a quality education for all

- Promote a culture of collaboration

- Model democratic decision-making

We have developed a short analytical tool [28] to aid educators in the task of subjecting policies, programs and practices to critical examination. This tool is designed to be used by AGPPA as it seeks to respond to the national policy agenda, and by schools for the purposes of policy development and analysis and professional development. In the next part of this report (Part 5) we demonstrate how such a tool might be used to analyse strategies that the federal government has developed and implemented in the name of the 'Education

Revolution'. We ask whether these strategies will help to achieve or impede the rhetorical commitment to the public purposes of education represented in the *Melbourne Declaration*.

Part 5: The national education agenda: is it serving public purposes?

5.1 Critical analysis of policy texts

In this section we undertake a critical policy analysis of the current national education agenda, referred to by the federal government as the 'Education Revolution'. In so doing we will use the conceptual framework and the insights described in previous sections of the report as the 'lens' through which we will ask the question: Is the national education agenda serving public purposes? A shorthand version of this framework is contained in the analytical tool [28].

5.2 Is the 'Education Revolution' serving public purposes?

(A longer version of this paper is available [26])

5.2.1 What is the declared purpose?

At the level of policy rhetoric, the Rudd/Gillard Government has shifted away from the dominant private purposes of education under Howard, towards a constrained public purpose – education as a tool of the economy (i.e., economic purpose). Almost every major government document and statement emphasises the importance of education to the development of human capital (e.g., ALP, 2007; Gillard, 2010).

Although the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* [25] contains a far more expansive view of the purposes of education, the public rhetoric of the Rudd/Gillard Government and many of its strategies limit the vision of the educational revolution to that of seeing students as (potential) human capital, to be enlisted in the cause of economic recovery and growth. Such a stance marginalises the cultural, social, political and relational aspects of education. It understands students as potential workers and consumers, rather than as local and global citizens.

However, there are two other less dominant but apparent purposes that circulate in the background of the policy discourse. The first relates to the individual purposes of education. Some remnants of the Howard era are still evident, especially in the language of choice. An example of this is the MySchool policy which is promoted and justified on the grounds that it gives parents (consumers) information that enables them to 'choose' between schools, thereby constructing education as a personal commodity. This is reflected

in the title MySchool, which is far more individual than a title such as, say, OurSchool, which would suggest a sense of school community.

The second purpose is a strong public purpose – making equity a major goal of the 'Education Revolution'. The government is taking seriously the fact that too many students from 'disadvantaged' backgrounds have, for too long, been short-changed by the education system. Therefore, the government has committed itself to priorities such as lifting retention rates to Year 12 or equivalent to 90 per cent by 2020, sharply increasing rates of participation in higher education for students from 'disadvantaged' backgrounds, and raising literacy and numeracy outcomes, especially for indigenous students where it has a target of halving the attainment gap in Year 12 by 2020.

This shift to placing equity goals at the heart of education policy is clearly consistent with the democratic purposes of education. The emphasis on individual choice always advantages those who have the largest helpings of economic, social and cultural capital. If it is a fundamental principle of a democratic society that all young people must have an equal entitlement to a quality education, it follows that the society must remove the barriers to successful participation in education. The Rudd/Gillard Government's commitment to equity is a tangible expression of this principle. However, it is diluted by the dominant focus on the economic purposes of education and, as we will go on to argue, contradicted by some aspects of its agenda that are counterproductive to this key aim.

In order to assess the extent to which the 'Education Revolution' is enacting public purposes it is necessary to go beyond policy rhetoric to its enactment. How does the Education Revolution stand up? It is here that we need to consider the three modalities of schooling that we described in Part 2 of this report. We will take an example from each of the modalities, assessing it against the 'public good' principles identified in Part 3. We will argue that, despite the rhetoric at the heart of the Education Revolution as represented in the Melbourne Goals of Schooling, the three arteries are quite seriously clogged.

5.2.2 Case study 1: Funding

In Part 3 we argued that, since the rationale for education as a public good is a democratic rationale, there needs to be an equal (and broad) educational provision **for all** – one where all educational institutions are inclusive, comprehensive, collaborative, well-resourced, and staffed by the best quality teachers. That is, the role of the state here is to ensure that every local community in Australia is provided with publicly-funded state schools with these characteristics. As Geoffrey Robertson (2009) argues: 'A real revolution in education will only come when a government ensures that its state schools set the standard of excellence – then and only then will we have equity' (p. 2).

There are, at least, a couple of requirements here. First, using the concept of the Education Commons outlined in Part 3, our education systems must be constructed on the understanding that the health of all schools is as important as the health of its component parts. This commitment to the collective is not inconsistent with devolution – but it suggests that a policy to give schools greater flexibility would be characterised by notions of collaboration and collegiality, not fierce competition in an education market. We think that the Rudd/Gillard Government's apparent commitment to choice and education markets, and its support for independent stand-alone public schools competing in that market, are contradictory to its equity goals and at odds with the public purposes of education.

Second, a public purpose approach to funding would, as far as possible, seek to remove resource differentials between schools. Has this principle underpinned the Rudd/Gillard Government's approach to funding? Although in the past two years there has been an overall increase in commonwealth funding of schools through such programs as the Building the Education Revolution, the Digital Education Revolution and the National Partnerships scheme, there has been no change to the way in which recurrent funding is calculated or distributed to the various education sectors.

Essentially, the government has maintained all of the anomalies and inequities in the current approach to recurrent funding, including the Howard initiated Socio-Economic Status (SES) measure and its associated guarantees that no 'private' school will be worse off under the system than it was before the introduction of the SES. As a result, the Labor government continues to adhere to recurrent funding approaches which ignore the level of resources enjoyed by many wealthy schools; and to fund even the lowest funded private schools at 13.7 per cent of Average Government School Recurrent Costs (AGSRC), when the per capita grant for all government schools is 10 per cent of AGSRC. As McMorrow (2009) observes, '... the current system is arbitrary, dysfunctional, irrational and partial' (p. 9).

The Rudd/ Gillard Government established a review in 2010 that will canvass these issues in order to construct an approach for the next triennium, starting in 2012. In our view, it will be important to establish principles for the review based on the **democratic** purposes of education in order to arrive at a comprehensive national approach to recurrent funding. This should start with the fundamental principle of providing universal access to quality state schools in every community as the reference point for funding decisions. But until that review has been conducted and decisions taken, it must be said that the Rudd/Gillard government has failed to bite the bullet on the funding issue.

5.2.3 Case study 2: Curriculum

As we argued in Part 3, an official curriculum based on the public purposes of education is one which aims to develop in all students the capabilities to live productive and fulfilling lives in a democratic society, and to contribute to sustaining and improving that society. We think that this commitment to the public purposes of education demands a curriculum which is based on a rationale for the 21st century; is broad and comprehensive; enables cross disciplinary work; takes equity seriously; and is developed democratically, involving as broad a range of people as possible and using the knowledge and expertise of those charged with its delivery – teachers. How does the Rudd/Gillard Government's national curriculum shape up when assessed against these principles?[11] (detailed analysis of the draft national curriculum [26].)

In our view the idea of a national curriculum for Australian schools is long overdue. An official curriculum should reflect the kind of society we are and want to become, and seek to develop the sorts of capabilities that young people need in order to become active participants in our political, economic, social and cultural life. This is a national aspiration. However, achieving these goals depends on the quality of the curriculum that is designed, and we have some significant reservations about the drafts that are currently online. These concerns relate to the shape of the curriculum overall, rather than to the fine detail of each subject, which has tended to be the focus of commentary in the media so far.

First, there is no statement about ACARA's view of curriculum. On the basis of what is on offer to date, it seems that a curriculum is simply a number of stand-alone subjects. Thus the announcement about the government's intention to introduce a national curriculum was accompanied by the decision to develop four subjects – Maths, Science, English and History. Developments since that time have reinforced the view that the official curriculum is simply a series of discrete subjects with little obvious connection.

This impoverished view of curriculum has led to a process where, rather than describe the whole curriculum at the outset, curriculum development has become a process of drip-feeding subjects. Since the initial announcement and after intense lobbying by various subject associations, it has been agreed that Languages, Geography and the Arts can be added to the mix. At the time of writing, we are waiting for decisions about the fate of such areas as Health and Physical Education, Design and Technology and Civics Education.

Apart from making it difficult to assess the whole curriculum, such a process creates a hierarchy of valued knowledge. The four subjects which were announced first will set the benchmark for the ways in which the curriculum will be presented and assessed – and indeed will occupy the lion's share of the whole curriculum. This might be defensible – but there is no argued case for allowing a judgment such as this to be made. Using the public

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[11] As the basis of this analysis, we will use the drafts of the K-10 curriculum which were circulating at the time of writing this report.

purposes criteria, an official curriculum should be more than a number of disconnected subjects. At the very least, the shape of the curriculum should emerge from a consideration of some key questions related to such matters as the criteria for knowledge selection and organization, and the learning theories which inform it.

Second, there is a lack of curriculum coherence. Official curriculum documents should spell out the whole of an intended curriculum – what is in it, what weighting is given to each section, what is core and elective, how assessment and reporting will work and so on – with the whole having an overall coherence and integrity. What is being called the national curriculum has none of this at present. It is difficult to know how development and consultation can occur in the absence of an appreciation of the whole, including whether or not there is a core and if so, how much of the curriculum it occupies. The parts make no sense without an understanding of the whole.

Third, the drafts are superficial in relation to some important aspects of learning for the 21st century. For example, there is no mention of cross-disciplinary learning, a very confused approach to assessment, and a simplistic view of equity as being simply the naming of under-represented people and groups.

Finally, the process is being rushed without time for adequate consultation with the profession and the broader community. After a 10 week consultation period for the four subjects, the Australian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (ACARA) will produce the final documents and distribute them to every school in the country in August for implementation from 2011. That is, teachers will only have about three months to acquaint themselves with a brand new curriculum before implementing it at the beginning of the 2011 school year. This unseemly haste is contrary to what we know about educational change and ways to establish communities of professional learners. More than this, there has been no systematic attempt to work with University Education Faculties to address the short-term need for professional development programs in new aspects of the national curriculum, or the ongoing need for changes to undergraduate programs, including the expectation that all primary teachers will be trained to teach History.

In summary, it is difficult to see how the current version of the national curriculum can do anything but narrow the learning opportunities available to Australian students. It certainly fails to meet the test of achieving the kind of learning consistent with broad public purposes for Australian society in the 21st century.

5.2.4 Case study 3: Process and structures – accountability

An education based on public purposes would model democratic practices at the level of systems (policy making) and individual institutions. It would also take seriously the process of review and accountability, seeking to enhance quality on an ongoing basis, but ensuring

that such processes are not inconsistent with or counter–productive to a public good philosophy. We will use the strategy of MySchool to argue that the 'Education Revolution' fails this test.

Prime Minister Gillard argues the need for 'transparent accountability', and the MySchool website is slated to carry much of the burden. Launched with great fanfare at the end of January 2010, the dominant information that appears on the current version of MySchool about each school is its annual NAPLAN (National Assessment Program – Literacy And Numeracy) results. Schools currently use NAPLAN as a diagnostic tool to assess standards and to target areas for improvement in literacy and numeracy. This is a useful function. However, now that MySchool has been introduced, NAPLAN has moved from being an aid for assisting teaching and learning, to being a high-stakes test which purports to measure the quality of a whole school and compare it to other schools.

We are told that more information about schools may be added in the future. But since we don't know what that might look like, we can only assess the version of MySchool that currently exists.

We would argue that an accountability policy which takes the **public purposes** of education seriously would:

- *Be developed in consultation with the profession* – in fact, the idea for MySchool and then the site itself was simply foisted on education systems and schools with little discussion;

- *Assume that to obtain a picture of the quality of education requires a range of data* – instead it is claimed that MySchool describes the quality of a school based on very narrow and limited information which purports to have scientific objectivity. There is nothing which pertains to democratic purposes of education, such as social and cultural outcomes. NAPLAN was not designed to represent the quality of a school and so MySchool is a corruption of its original purpose.

- *Be evidence-based, taking account of research in this area* – in fact, the MySchool policy approach ignores findings from studies conducted in the UK and US, which demonstrates that the use of standardised testing in this way has deleterious effects, including: that it narrows the curriculum and causes teachers to teach for the test; damages the morale and self-image of schools at the foot of the league tables that are inevitably created; and does not improve quality over time.

- *Promote rigorous and open investigation and inquiry into the cause of problems, issues, dilemmas and concerns in schools* – in fact such high-stake approaches (league tables, monetary rewards for schools and teachers) cause schools and

individual teachers to throw up smokescreens, cover by excluding children from tests and focus on students at the cut-off points, not those at the top or bottom ends.

- *Recognise the complexity related to learning outcomes and such factors as socio-economic status and cultural background, and promote approaches which seek to explore causes and trial approaches over time* – by contrast, MySchool assumes that quality improvement in schools is just a matter of identifying low NAPLAN scores and throwing money at the problem.

- *Understand that quality learning outcomes are a result of collaborative endeavours within schools and across schools* – whereas MySchool is based on the (mistaken) belief that it will enable parents to choose between schools in an education market, ignoring the fact that the majority of parents are not in a position to choose.

- *Promote schools as community centres (public goods) where people have an investment in working together to tackle problems and improve quality* – instead, MySchool assumes that people should shop around for schools as though they are consumer items like plasma TVs, thus creating the impression that education is a commodity, rather than a public good. This diminishes the sense of school community – that feeling of all working together to make this a great school – because it assumes that if you are unhappy you simply choose somewhere else to send your child.

That is, when judged against criteria consistent with the public purposes of schooling, we believe that the MySchool approach to accountability is not only flawed, but may diminish rather than enhance quality in education.

5.2 Conclusion

In this section we have used three examples drawn from each of the modalities of schooling to demonstrate that many of the strategies of the Education Revolution are contradictory to the public purposes of schooling set out in the *Melbourne Goals of Schooling*. The arteries are clogged. In our view the government needs to draw the public purposes of schooling back to centre stage by making the *Melbourne Goals* the touchstone for its policy making, rather than consigning them to the margins. Not to do so is to force schools to work against the grain as they seek to pursue the public purposes of education in an environment which is antagonistic to those aims.

Part 6: Recommendations

6.1 Introduction

We are now in a position to draw together our research findings in order to arrive at a set of recommendations for action. There is a brief preamble to each group of recommendations, where reference is made to the reason for the recommendation, and its basis in the research. We have used the three modalities of schooling as the organising framework for the recommendations.

6.2 Recommendations

That the policy and practice of the Australian Government Primary Principals Association (AGPPA) and the Foundation for Young Australians (FYA) be informed by the following set of recommendations for Australian education.

6.2.1 Goals of schooling and public purposes

The research project demonstrated that although any national and state educational policy or practice always embodies purposes, these purposes are rarely articulated, and when they are – such as in the *Melbourne Goals of Schooling* – they are seldom used as the reference point for decision-making or evaluation. As a consequence, policy is often disparate, disconnected and contradictory.

It is important that governments and education systems identify and then use agreed purposes of schooling as the touchstone for policy development and the evaluation of practice. These purposes should always be the subject of ongoing discussion and debate in the general and professional communities: that is, they are never fixed but should always be evolving to meet new circumstances and demands.

The project also made the case for a return to the public purposes of education, arguing that these should be paramount in an education system for a democratic society (Part 3). We identified some of the characteristics of an education system serving public purposes in Australia in the 21st century, and suggested that central to these were social justice and equity.

Recommendation 1: That education policy and its delivery is based upon a democratically agreed set of purposes.

Recommendation 2: That agreed-upon purposes are used as a central reference point for policy development and educational practice across funding and resources, curriculum, culture and processes.

Recommendation 3: That, consistent with available evidence, this set of purposes would have at its heart public purposes which are based upon a commitment to:

- **a cohesive and just community;**

- **responsible, competent and active citizens for democracy and the common good;**

- **social justice.**

6.2.2 Structures and resources which support and sustain public purposes

The project consistently confirmed that the rationale for the public purposes of education is a democratic rationale. This suggests that the foundation of any democratic society should be equal educational provision for all – one where all educational institutions are inclusive, comprehensive, well-resourced and staffed by the best quality teachers. The role of the state is to ensure that every local community in Australia is provided with publicly-funded schools with these characteristics. Clearly this principle is relevant to the federal funding review that is currently in process.

Our research suggests that approaches to funding should be developed which are transparent and which will ensure that the anomalies and inequities of the current funding system are addressed. The next funding iteration must reduce the resources gap that exists between schools in this country by reflecting educational need. As the case studies and the survey demonstrate (Part 4), there are a number of schools in this country that are working against the odds – taking the most challenging students without the resources or support enjoyed by schools in more affluent communities.

However, we think that an equitable provision for all goes beyond the provision of resources and facilities. This project has shown that education systems which are based on the public purposes of education must adhere to a number of broad democratic principles. These include the provision of a comprehensive curriculum that builds the capabilities of all young people to be active and productive members of our society, and an inclusive education which recognises diversity and fosters cohesion and a sense of community. In our view, approaches to federal funding must build in a requirement that all schools in receipt of government funds should work to achieve democratically-agreed public purposes.

Recommendation 4: That the governance and funding of schools must reflect the public purposes of schools by ensuring that school systems can guarantee equitable and just provision, rather than promoting individual schools to compete in an educational market.

Recommendation 5: That a schooling system which is committed to public purposes of education must be underpinned by a transparent resourcing approach, which:

- **requires delivery of a curriculum for the public good (see recommendations 6, 7 and 8 below);**

- **supports inclusive school practices with regards to enrolments and curriculum;**

- **reflects educational need;**

- **considers the level of public resources in relation to resources that the school has access to from other sources.**

6.2.3 Curriculum which reflects and models democratic public purposes

An official curriculum based on the public good is one which aims to develop in all students the capabilities to live productive and fulfilling lives in a democratic society, and to contribute to sustaining and improving that society. This has a number of implications for curriculum design and practice. For example, curriculum in the compulsory years of schooling should be broad and comprehensive, rather than differentiated and hierarchical; pedagogy should model and promote democratic practices, involving students in its design and linking it to their lives and communities; and assessment should be 'for' learning as well as 'of' learning, and should cover and enrich all aspects of learning rather than promote a narrow band of study. The survey and case studies in this project suggest that a number of policies, such as the use to which the NAPLAN data is being put, make it more difficult for schools to enact a curriculum which serves public purposes.

Recommendation 6: That the curriculum and its enactment are based upon a commitment to student development of agreed capabilities to live full and productive lives in a democratic society.

Recommendation 7: That the official curriculum should not comprise a disconnected collection of understandings and skills, but be based on a coherent view of the whole curriculum and the connections among its component parts.

Recommendation 8: That system-wide assessments reflect all aspects of learning, not just a narrow band that is thought to be easily measured.

6.2.4 Culture and processes which reflect and model public purposes

An education system based on public purposes would model democratic practices at the level of systems (policy making) and individual institutions. It would also take seriously the processes of review and accountability, seeking to enhance quality on an ongoing basis, but ensuring that such processes are not inconsistent with or counter-productive to a public purposes philosophy.

An important aspect of open, transparent and democratic education is the culture in which it functions. Our research demonstrates that public purposes flourish in an environment of trust, respect and collaboration, where people feel free to reveal and discuss problems, issues and dilemmas. The survey told us that imposed and top-down educational policy, which seeks to compare schools and promote competition in an education market, is far more likely to cause educators to be defensive.

The case studies show what happens when a school organises itself as a community of professional learners, engaging in collaborative and deep investigations into educational practice. It is clear that establishing the culture and structures for this to occur is a prime responsibility of our leaders; and that leaders also have a crucial role to play in the wider community to articulate and promote the public purposes of education[12]. Although the project did not address teacher pre-service education, in our view it follows from some of the insights, that our future educators should be exposed to a pre-service experience that reflects the recommendations in this report.

Recommendation 9: That decision-making and subsequent change/reform at all levels of education and schooling be democratic, evidence-based and transparent, and involve, where possible and relevant, education professionals, parents, students and the wider community.

Recommendation 10: That education policy and practice should be based on a commitment to the creation of system-wide cultures of trust, respect and collaboration, promoting communities of professional learners.

Recommendation 11: That accountability should not encourage exclusionary practices, narrowing of the curriculum, or competition among schools and teachers.

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[12] For recent overviews of research on Australian school leadership see: Mulford, 2008; Mulford, Cranston and Ehrich, 2009; Mulford and Edmunds, 2009.

Rather, accountability should be open, professional, transparent, inquiry-based, rigorous and focused upon all aspects of learning.

Recommendation 12: That school leaders take professional responsibility, individually and through their professional associations, for articulating and enacting the public purposes of education in schools and education systems.

Recommendation 13: That pre-service teacher education and ongoing professional learning be provided to build awareness of and the capacity to deliver the recommendations in this report[13].

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[13] Materials designed for in-service professional development [24] with teachers are provided.

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   http://www.acde.edu.au/pages/images/Public Education as an Education Commons (199Kb).pdf
[2a] and [2b]: Purposes of Education (long 2a and short 2b)
[3a] and [3b]: History (long 3a and short 3b)
[4a] and [4b]: Forces and their implications (long 4a and short 4b)
[5a] and [5b]: Politics (long 5a and short 5b)

POLICY
[6]: Queensland Policy Makers
[7]: Tasmania Policy Makers
[8]: Queensland Policy Texts
[9]: Tasmania Policy Texts
[10]: Victoria Policy Texts

MEDIA
[11]: Queensland
[12]: Tasmania
[13]: Victoria

SCHOOLS
[14]: Lansdowne
[15]: Southbank
[16]: Eastfield
[17]: Blue Hills
[18]: St Porters
[19]: Harvester Catholic

SURVEY
[20]: Survey
[21a]: Survey Results and [21b]: Summary Data
[22]: Survey Results by Demographic Variables
[23]: Survey Open-ended Results

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING MATERIAL
[24]: Professional Learning Material

OTHER
[25]: Melbourne Declaration of Educational Goals for Young Australians (December, 2008). –
   http://www.curriculum.edu.au/verve/_resources/National_Declaration_on_the_Educational_Goals_for_Young_Australians.pdf
[26]: Current Federal Policy – The Educational Revolution
[27]: Building Social Capital in Communities of Professional Learners
[28]: Analytical Tool